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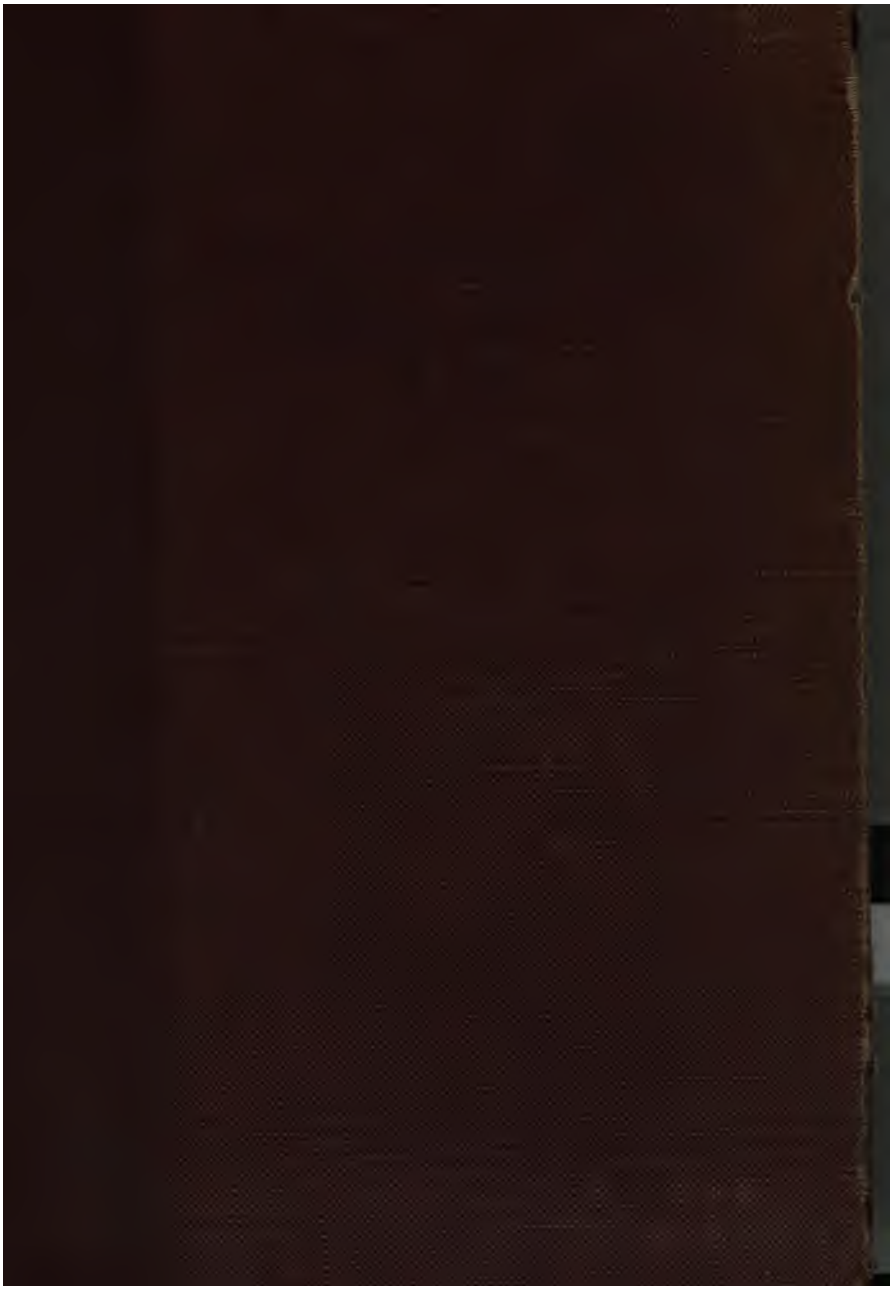

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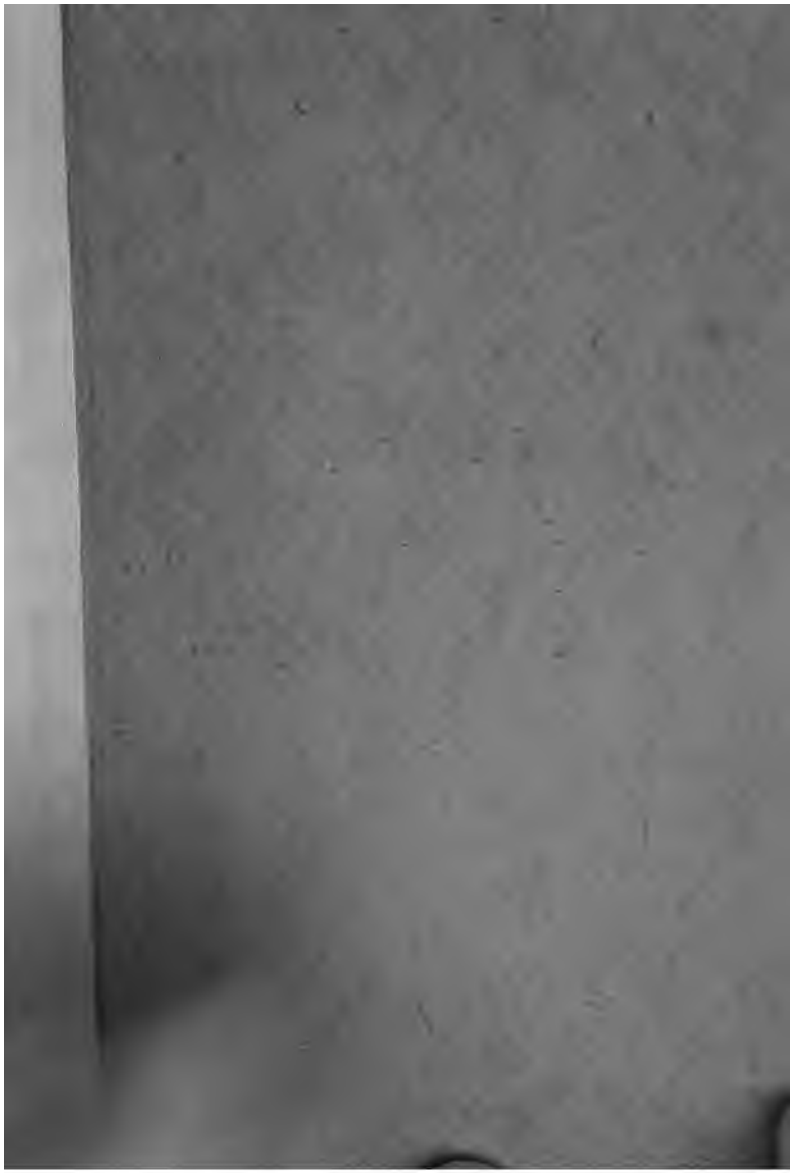

JANE AUSTEN

EMMA

VOLUME II.

Emma
By Jane Austen

In Two Volumes
Vol. II.

Boston, 1892
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EMMA.

CHAPTER I.

IT may be possible to do without dancing entirely. Instances have been known of young people passing many, many months successively, without being at any ball of any description, and no material injury accrue either to body or mind; but when a beginning is made, — when the felicities of rapid motion have once been, though slightly, felt, — it must be a very heavy set that does not ask for more.

Frank Churchill had danced once at Highbury, and longed to dance again; and the last half-hour of an evening which Mr. Woodhouse was persuaded to spend with his daughter at Randalls was passed by the two young people in schemes on the subject. Frank's was the first idea, and his the greatest zeal in pursuing it; for the lady was the best judge of the difficulties, and the most solicitous for accommodation and appearance. But still she had incli-

nation enough for shewing people again how delightfully Mr. Frank Churchill and Miss Woodhouse danced — for doing that in which she need not blush to compare herself with Jane Fairfax — and even for simple dancing itself, without any of the wicked aids of vanity — to assist him first in pacing out the room they were in to see what it could be made to hold — and then in taking the dimensions of the other parlor, in the hope of discovering, in spite of all that Mr. Weston could say of their exactly equal size, that it was a little the largest.

His first proposition and request, that the dance begun at Mr. Cole's should be finished there, — that the same party should be collected, and the same musician engaged, — met with the readiest acquiescence. Mr. Weston entered into the idea with thorough enjoyment, and Mrs. Weston most willingly undertook to play as long as they could wish to dance; and the interesting employment had followed, of reckoning up exactly who there would be, and portioning out the indispensable division of space to every couple.

'You and Miss Smith and Miss Fairfax will be three, and the two Miss Coxes five," had been repeated many times over. "And there will be the two Gilberts, young Cox, my father, and myself, besides Mr. Knightley. Yes, that will be quite enough for pleasure. You and Miss Smith and Miss Fairfax will be three, and the two Miss Coxes five; and for five couple there will be plenty of room."

But soon it came to be on one side, —

"But will there be good room for five couple? — I really do not think there will."

On another, —

"And after all, five couple are not enough to make it worth while to stand up. Five couple are nothing, when one thinks seriously about it. It will not do to invite five couple. It can be allowable only as the thought of the moment."

Somebody said that Miss Gilbert was expected at her brother's, and must be invited with the rest. Somebody else believed Mrs. Gilbert would have danced the other evening, if she had been asked. A word was put in for a second young Cox; and at last, Mr. Weston naming one family of cousins who must be included, and another of very old acquaintance who could not be left out, it became a certainty that the five couple would be at least ten, and a very interesting speculation in what possible manner they could be disposed of.

The doors of the two rooms were just opposite each other. "Might not they use both rooms, and dance across the passage?" It seemed the best scheme; and yet it was not so good but that many of them wanted a better. Emma said it would be awkward; Mrs. Weston was in distress about the supper; and Mr. Woodhouse opposed it earnestly on the score of health. It made him so very unhappy, indeed, that it could not be persevered in.

"Oh, no," said he; "it would be the extreme of imprudence. I could not bear it for Emma! — Emma is not strong. She would catch a dreadful cold. So would poor little Harriet. So you would all. Mrs. Weston, you would be quite laid up; do

not let them talk of such a wild thing; pray do not let them talk of it. That young man," speaking lower, "is very thoughtless. Do not tell his father, but that young man is not quite the thing. He has been opening the doors very often this evening, and keeping them open very inconsiderately. He does not think of the draught. I do not mean to set you against him, but indeed he is not quite the thing."

Mrs. Weston was sorry for such a charge. She knew the importance of it, and said everything in her power to do it away. Every door was now closed, the passage plan given up, and the first scheme, of dancing only in the room they were in, resorted to again; and with such good-will on Frank Churchill's part, that the space which a quarter of an hour before had been deemed barely sufficient for five couple, was now endeavored to be made out quite enough for ten.

"We were too magnificent," said he. "We allowed unnecessary room. Ten couple may stand here very well."

Emma demurred. "It would be a crowd, — a sad crowd; and what could be worse than dancing without space to turn in?"

"Very true," he gravely replied; "it was very bad." But still he went on measuring, and still he ended with, —

"I think there will be very tolerable room for ten couple."

"No, no," said she, "you are quite unreasonable. It would be dreadful to be standing so close. Nothing can be farther from pleasure than to be

dancing in a crowd — and a crowd in a little room."

"There is no denying it," he replied. "I agree with you exactly. A crowd in a little room — Miss Woodhouse, you have the art of giving pictures in a few words. Exquisite, quite exquisite! Still, however, having proceeded so far, one is unwilling to give the matter up. It would be a disappointment to my father — and altogether — I do not know that — I am rather of opinion that ten couple might stand here very well."

Emma perceived that the nature of his gallantry was a little self-willed, and that he would rather oppose than lose the pleasure of dancing with her; but she took the compliment, and forgave the rest. Had she intended ever to marry him, it might have been worth while to pause and consider, and try to understand the value of his preference and the character of his temper; but for all the purposes of their acquaintance he was quite amiable enough.

Before the middle of the next day he was at Hartfield; and he entered the room with such an agreeable smile as certified the continuance of the scheme. It soon appeared that he came to announce an improvement.

"Well, Miss Woodhouse," he almost immediately began, "your inclination for dancing has not been quite frightened away, I hope, by the terrors of my father's little rooms. I bring a new proposal on the subject, — a thought of my father's, which waits only your approbation to be acted upon. May I hope for the honor of your hand for

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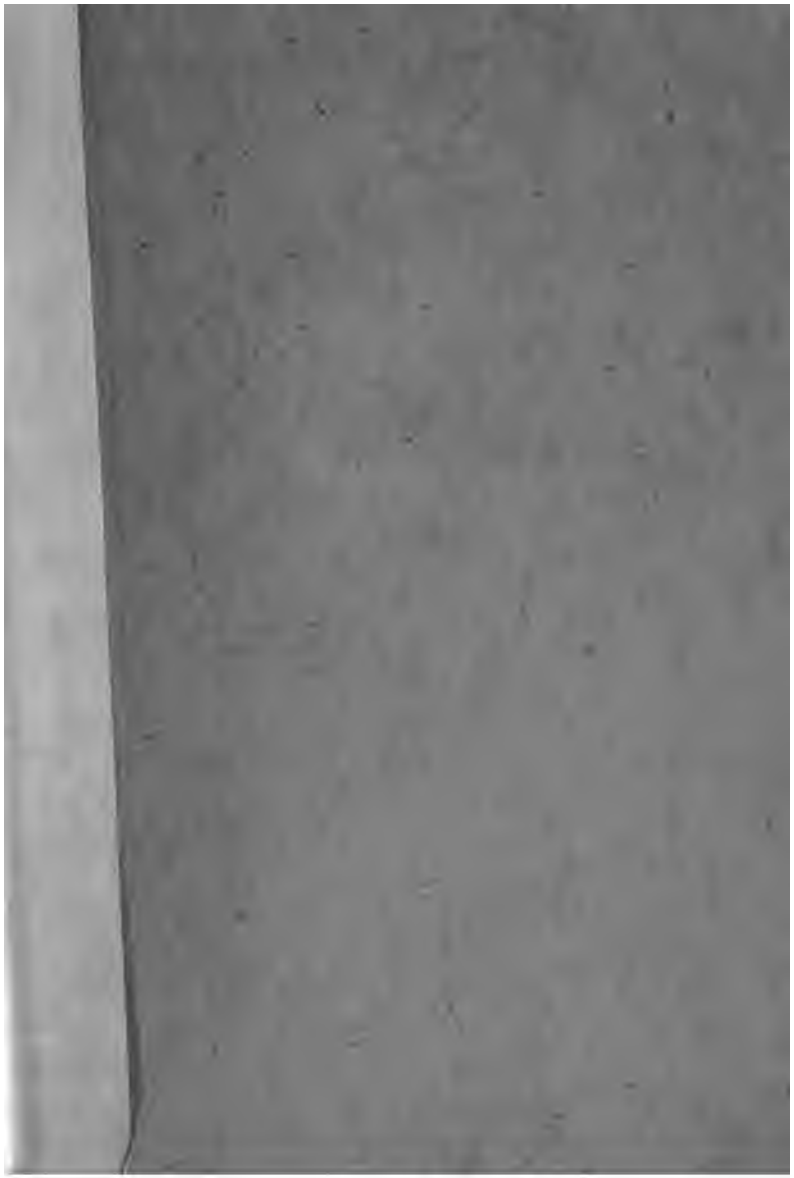

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CHAPTER II.

One thing only was wanting to make the prospect of the ball completely satisfactory to Emma, — its being fixed for a day within the granted term of Frank Churchill's stay in Surrey; for, in spite of Mr. Weston's confidence, she could not think it so very impossible that the Churchills might not allow their nephew to remain a day beyond his fortnight. But this was not judged feasible. The preparations must take their time, nothing could be properly ready till the third week were entered on, and for a few days they must be planning, proceeding, and hoping in uncertainty, at the risk — in her opinion, the great risk — of its being all in vain.

Enscombe, however, was gracious, — gracious in fact, if not in word. His wish of staying longer evidently did not please; but it was not opposed. All was safe and prosperous; and as the removal of one solicitude generally makes way for another, Emma, being now certain of her ball, began to adopt as the next vexation Mr. Knightley's provoking indifference about it. Either because he did not dance himself, or because the plan had been formed without his being consulted, he seemed resolved that it should not interest him, determined against its exciting any present curios-

ity, or affording him any future amusement. To her voluntary communications Emma could get no more approving reply than, —

"Very well. If the Westons think it worth while to be at all this trouble for a few hours of noisy entertainment, I have nothing to say against it, but that they shall not choose pleasures for me. — Oh, yes! I must be there; I could not refuse; and I will keep as much awake as I can; but I would rather be at home, looking over William Larkins's week's account; much rather, I confess. — Pleasure in seeing dancing! — not I, indeed! I never look at it — I do not know who does. Fine dancing, I believe, like virtue, must be its own reward. Those who are standing by are usually thinking of something very different."

This Emma felt was aimed at her; and it made her quite angry. It was not in compliment to Jane Fairfax, however, that he was so indifferent or so indignant; he was not guided by her feelings in reprobating the ball, for she enjoyed the thought of it to an extraordinary degree. It made her animated, open-hearted: she voluntarily said, —

"Oh! Miss Woodhouse, I hope nothing may happen to prevent the ball! What a disappointment it would be! I do look forward to it, I own, with very great pleasure."

It was not to oblige Jane Fairfax, therefore, that he would have preferred the society of William Larkins. No! — she was more and more convinced that Mrs. Weston was quite mistaken in that surmise. There was a great deal of friendly

and of compassionate attachment on his side, but no love.

Alas! there was soon no leisure for quarrelling with Mr. Knightley. Two days of joyful security were immediately followed by the overthrow of everything. A letter arrived from Mr. Churchill to urge his nephew's instant return. Mrs. Churchill was unwell, — far too unwell to do without him; she had been in a very suffering state (so said her husband) when writing to her nephew two days before, though from her usual unwillingness to give pain, and constant habit of never thinking of herself, she had not mentioned it; but now she was too ill to trifle, and must entreat him to set off for Enscombe without delay.

The substance of this letter was forwarded to Emma, in a note from Mrs. Weston, instantly. As to his going, it was inevitable. He must be gone within a few hours, though without feeling any real alarm for his aunt, to lessen his repugnance. He knew her illnesses; they never occurred but for her own convenience.

Mrs. Weston added, "that he could only allow himself time to hurry to Highbury, after breakfast, and take leave of the few friends there whom he could suppose to feel any interest in him; and that he might be expected at Hartfield very soon."

This wretched note was the finale of Emma's breakfast. When once it had been read, there was no doing anything but lament and exclaim. The loss of the ball, — the loss of the young man, — and all that the young man might be feeling! It was too wretched! Such a delightful evening as it

would have been! Everybody so happy! and she and her partner the happiest! "I said it would be so," was the only consolation.

Her father's feelings were quite distinct. He thought principally of Mrs. Churchill's illness, and wanted to know how she was treated; and as for the ball, it was shocking to have dear Emma disappointed; but they would all be safer at home.

Emma was ready for her visitor some time before he appeared; but if this reflected at all upon his impatience, his sorrowful look and total want of spirits when he did come might redeem him. He felt the going away almost too much to speak of it. His dejection was most evident. He sat really lost in thought for the first few minutes; and when rousing himself, it was only to say, —

"Of all horrid things, leave-taking is the worst."

"But you will come again," said Emma. "This will not be your only visit to Randalls."

"Ah!" shaking his head; "the uncertainty of when I may be able to return! I shall try for it with a zeal! It will be the object of all my thoughts and cares! and if my uncle and aunt go to town this spring — but I am afraid — they did not stir last spring — I am afraid it is a custom gone forever."

"Our poor ball must be quite given up."

"Ah! that ball! Why did we wait for anything? — why not seize the pleasure at once? How often is happiness destroyed by preparation,

foolish preparation! — You told us it would be so. Oh! Miss Woodhouse, why are you always so right?"

"Indeed, I am very sorry to be right in this instance. I would much rather have been merry than wise."

"If I can come again, we are still to have our ball. My father depends on it. Do not forget your engagement."

Emma looked graciously.

"Such a fortnight as it has been!" he continued; "every day more precious and more delightful than the day before, — every day making me less fit to bear any other place. Happy those who can remain at Highbury!"

"As you do us such ample justice now," said Emma, laughing, "I will venture to ask whether you did not come a little doubtingly at first? Do not we rather surpass your expectations? I am sure we do. I am sure you did not much expect to like us. You would not have been so long in coming if you had had a pleasant idea of Highbury."

He laughed rather consciously; and though denying the sentiment, Emma was convinced that it had been so.

"And you must be off this very morning?"

"Yes; my father is to join me here: we shall walk back together, and I must be off immediately. I am almost afraid that every moment will bring him."

"Not five minutes to spare, even for your friends Miss Fairfax and Miss Bates? How un-

lucky! Miss Bates's powerful, argumentative mind might have strengthened yours."

"Yes, — I have called there; passing the door, I thought it better. It was a right thing to do. I went in for three minutes, and was detained by Miss Bates's being absent. She was out ; and I felt it impossible not to wait till she came in. She is a woman that one may, that one must laugh at, but that one would not wish to slight. It was better to pay my visit, then — "

He hesitated, got up, walked to a window.

"In short," said he, "perhaps, Miss Woodhouse — I think you can hardly be quite without suspicion — "

He looked at her, as if wanting to read her thoughts. She hardly knew what to say. It seemed like the forerunner of something absolutely serious, which she did not wish. Forcing herself to speak, therefore, in the hope of putting it by, she calmly said, —

"You are quite in the right; it was most natural to pay your visit, then — "

He was silent. She believed he was looking at her; probably reflecting on what she had said, and trying to understand the manner. She heard him sigh. It was natural for him to feel that he had cause to sigh. He could not believe her to be encouraging him. A few awkward moments passed, and he sat down again; and in a more determined manner said, —

"It was something to feel that all the rest of my time might be given to Hartfield. My regard for Hartfield is most warm — "

He stopped again, rose again, and seemed quite embarrassed. He was more in love with her than Emma had supposed; and who can say how it might have ended, if his father had not made his appearance? Mr. Woodhouse soon followed; and the necessity of exertion made him composed.

A very few minutes more, however, completed the present trial. Mr. Weston, always alert when business was to be done, and as incapable of procrastinating any evil that was inevitable, as of foreseeing any that was doubtful, said, "It was time to go;" and the young man, though he might and did sigh, could not but agree, and rise to take leave.

"I shall hear about you all," said he; "that is my chief consolation. I shall hear of everything that is going on among you. I have engaged Mrs. Weston to correspond with me. She has been so kind as to promise it. Oh! the blessing of a female correspondent, when one is really interested in the absent! — she will tell me everything. In her letters I shall be at dear Highbury again."

A very friendly shake of the hand, a very earnest "Good-by," closed the speech, and the door had soon shut out Frank Churchill. Short had been the notice, — short their meeting; he was gone; and Emma felt so sorry to part, and foresaw so great a loss to their little society from his absence, as to begin to be afraid of being too sorry and feeling it too much.

It was a sad change. They had been meeting almost every day since his arrival. Certainly his

being at Randalls had given great spirit to the last two weeks, — indescribable spirit; the idea, the expectation of seeing him which every morning had brought, the assurance of his attentions, his liveliness, his manners! It had been a very happy fortnight, and forlorn must be the sinking from it into the common course of Hartfield days. To complete every other recommendation, he had almost told her that he loved her. What strength or what constancy of affection he might be subject to was another point; but at present she could not doubt his having a decidedly warm admiration, a conscious preference of herself; and this persuasion, joined to all the rest, made her think that she must be a little in love with him, in spite of every previous determination against it.

"I certainly must," said she. "This sensation of listlessness, weariness, stupidity, this disinclination to sit down and employ myself, this feeling of everything being dull and insipid about the house! — I must be in love; I should be the oddest creature in the world if I were not — for a few weeks at least. Well, evil to some is always good to others. I shall have many fellow-mourners for the ball, if not for Frank Churchill; but Mr. Knightley will be happy. He may spend the evening with his dear William Larkins now if he likes."

Mr. Knightley, however, showed no triumphant happiness. He could not say that he was sorry on his own account; his very cheerful look would have contradicted him if he had; but he said, and very steadily, that he was sorry for the disap-

pointment of the others, and with considerable kindness added, —

"You, Emma, who have so few opportunities of dancing, you are really out of luck; you are very much out of luck!"

It was some days before she saw Jane Fairfax, to judge of her honest regret in this woful change; but when they did meet, her composure was odious. She had been particularly unwell, however, suffering from headache to a degree which made her aunt declare that had the ball taken place she did not think Jane could have attended it; and it was charity to impute some of her unbecoming indifference to the languor of ill health.

CHAPTER III.

EMMA continued to entertain no doubt of her being in love. Her ideas only varied as to the how much. At first she thought it was a good deal; and afterwards but little. She had great pleasure in hearing Frank Churchill talked of; and, for his sake, greater pleasure than ever in seeing Mr. and Mrs. Weston; she was very often thinking of him, and quite impatient for a letter, that she might know how he was, how were his spirits, how was his aunt, and what was the chance of his coming to Randalls again this spring. But, on the other hand, she could not admit herself to be unhappy, nor, after the first morning, to be less disposed for employment than usual; she was still busy and cheerful; and, pleasing as he was, she could yet imagine him to have faults; and further, though thinking of him so much, and, as she sat drawing or working, forming a thousand amusing schemes for the progress and close of their attachment, fancying interesting dialogues, and inventing elegant letters, the conclusion of every imaginary declaration on his side was that she refused him. Their affection was always to subside into friendship. Everything tender and charming was to mark their parting; but still they were to part. When she became sensible of

this, it struck her that she could not be very much in love; for in spite of her previous and fixed determination never to quit her father, never to marry, a strong attachment certainly must produce more of a struggle than she could foresee in her own feelings.

"I do not find myself making any use of the word 'sacrifice'" said she. "In not one of all my clever replies, my delicate negatives, is there any allusion to making a sacrifice. I do suspect that he is not really necessary to my happiness. So much the better. I certainly will not persuade myself to feel more than I do. I am quite enough in love. I should be sorry to be more."

Upon the whole, she was equally contented with her view of his feelings.

"He is undoubtedly very much in love — everything denotes it — very much in love indeed! — and when he comes again, if his affection continue, I must be on my guard not to encourage it. It would be most inexcusable to do otherwise, as my own mind is quite made up. Not that I imagine he can think I have been encouraging him hitherto. No; if he had believed me at all to share his feelings, he would not have been so wretched. Could he have thought himself encouraged, his looks and language at parting would have been different. Still, however, I must be on my guard. This is in the supposition of his attachment continuing what it now is; but I do not know that I expect it will; I do not look upon him to be quite the sort of man — I do not altogether build upon his steadiness or constancy. His feelings are warm,

but I can imagine them rather changeable. Every consideration of the subject, in short, makes me thankful that my happiness is not more deeply involved. I shall do very well again after a little while, — and then it will be a good thing over; for they say everybody is in love once in their lives, and I shall have been let off easily."

When his letter to Mrs. Weston arrived, Emma had the perusal of it; and she read it with a degree of pleasure and admiration which made her at first shake her head over her own sensations, and think she had undervalued their strength. It was a long, well-written letter, giving the particulars of his journey and of his feelings, expressing all the affection, gratitude, and respect which was natural and honorable, and describing everything exterior and local that could be supposed attractive, with spirit and precision. No suspicious flourishes now of apology or concern: it was the language of real feeling towards Mrs. Weston; and the transition from Highbury to Enscombe, the contrast between the places in some of the first blessings of social life, was just enough touched on to show how keenly it was felt, and how much more might have been said but for the restraints of propriety. — The charm of her own name was not wanting. "Miss Woodhouse" appeared more than once, and never without a something of pleasing connection, either a compliment to her taste, or a remembrance of what she had said; and in the very last time of its meeting her eye, unadorned as it was by any such broad wreath of gallantry, she yet could discern the effect of her influence, and acknowledge

the greatest compliment perhaps of all conveyed. Compressed into the very lowest vacant corner were these words: "I had not a spare moment on Tuesday, as you know, for Miss Woodhouse's beautiful little friend. Pray make my excuses and adieus to her." This, Emma could not doubt, was all for herself. Harriet was remembered only from being her friend. His information and prospects as to Enscombe were neither worse nor better than had been anticipated; Mrs. Churchill was recovering, and he dared not yet, even in his own imagination, fix a time for coming to Randalls again.

Gratifying, however, and stimulative as was the letter in the material part, its sentiments, she yet found, when it was folded up and returned to Mrs. Weston, that it had not added any lasting warmth, — that she could still do without the writer, and that he must learn to do without her. Her intentions were unchanged. Her resolution of refusal only grew more interesting, by the addition of a scheme for his subsequent consolation and happiness. His recollection of Harriet, and the words which clothed it, — the "beautiful little friend," — suggested to her the idea of Harriet's succeeding her in his affections. Was it impossible? — No. Harriet undoubtedly was greatly his inferior in understanding; but he had been very much struck with the loveliness of her face and the warm simplicity of her manner; and all the probabilities of circumstance and connection were in her favor. For Harriet, it would be advantageous and delightful indeed.

"I must not dwell upon it," said she; "I must

not think of it. I know the danger of indulging such speculations. But stranger things have happened; and when we cease to care for each other as we do now, it will be the means of confirming us in that sort of true, disinterested friendship which I can already look forward to with pleasure."

It was well to have a comfort in store on Harriet's behalf, though it might be wise to let the fancy touch it seldom; for evil in that quarter was at hand. As Frank Churchill's arrival had succeeded Mr. Elton's engagement in the conversation of Highbury, as the latest interest had entirely borne down the first, so now, upon Frank Churchill's disappearance, Mr. Elton's concerns were assuming the most irresistible form. — His wedding-day was named. He would soon be among them again, — Mr. Elton and his bride. There was hardly time to talk over the first letter from Enscombe, before "Mr. Elton and his bride" was in everybody's mouth, and Frank Churchill was forgotten. Emma grew sick at the sound. She had had three weeks of happy exemption from Mr. Elton; and Harriet's mind, she had been willing to hope, had been lately gaining strength. With Mr. Weston's ball in view, at least, there had been a great deal of insensibility to other things; but it was now too evident that she had not attained such a state of composure as could stand against the actual approach, — new carriage, bell-ringing, and all.

Poor Harriet was in a flutter of spirits which required all the reasonings and soothings and

attentions of every kind that Emma could give. Emma felt that she could not do too much for her, that Harriet had a right to all her ingenuity and all her patience; but it was heavy work to be forever convincing without producing any effect, forever agreed to, without being able to make their opinions the same. Harriet listened submissively, and said "it was very true; it was just as Miss Woodhouse described, — it was not worth while to think about them, — and she would not think about them any longer." But no change of subject could avail, and the next half-hour saw her as anxious and restless about the Eltons as before. At last Emma attacked her on another ground.

"Your allowing yourself to be so occupied and so unhappy about Mr. Elton's marrying, Harriet, is the strongest reproach you can make me. You could not give me a greater reproof for the mistake I fell into. It was all my doing, I know. I have not forgotten it, I assure you. Deceived myself, I did very miserably deceive you; and it will be a painful reflection to me forever. Do not imagine me in danger of forgetting it."

Harriet felt this too much to utter more than a few words of eager exclamation. Emma continued, —

"I have not said, exert yourself, Harriet, for my sake; think less, talk less of Mr. Elton for my sake; because, for your own sake rather, I would wish it to be done, for the sake of what is more important than my comfort, — a habit of self-command in you, a consideration of what is your duty, an attention to propriety, an endeavor to avoid the suspicions of others, to save your health and credit,

and restore your tranquillity. These are the motives which I have been pressing on you. They are very important, and sorry I am that you cannot feel them sufficiently to act upon them. My being saved from pain is a very secondary consideration. I want you to save yourself from greater pain. Perhaps I may sometimes have felt that Harriet would not forget what was due, — or rather, what would be kind by me."

This appeal to her affections did more than all the rest. The idea of wanting gratitude and consideration for Miss Woodhouse, whom she really loved extremely, made her wretched for a while; and when the violence of grief was comforted away, still remained powerful enough to prompt to what was right, and support her in it very tolerably.

"You who have been the best friend I ever had in my life! — Want gratitude to you! — Nobody is equal to you! I care for nobody as I do for you! Oh, Miss Woodhouse, how ungrateful I have been!"

Such expressions, assisted as they were by everything that look and manner could do, made Emma feel that she had never loved Harriet so well, nor valued her affection so highly before.

"There is no charm equal to tenderness of heart," said she afterwards to herself. "There is nothing to be compared to it. Warmth and tenderness of heart, with an affectionate, open manner, will beat all the clearness of head in the world, for attraction: I am sure it will. It is tenderness of heart which makes my dear father so generally beloved, which gives Isabella all her popularity.

I have it not; but I know how to prize and respect it. Harriet is my superior in all the charm and all the felicity it gives. Dear Harriet! — I would not change you for the clearest-headed, longest-sighted, best-judging female breathing. Oh, the coldness of a Jane Fairfax! Harriet is worth a hundred such; and for a wife — a sensible man's wife — it is invaluable. I mention no names; but happy the man who changes Emma for Harriet!"

CHAPTER IV.

Mrs. Elton was first seen at church; but though devotion might be interrupted, curiosity could not be satisfied by a bride in a pew, and it must be left for the visits in form which were then to be paid, to settle whether she were very pretty indeed, or only rather pretty, or not pretty at all.

Emma had feelings, less of curiosity than of pride or propriety, to make her resolve on not being the last to pay her respects; and she made a point of Harriet's going with her, that the worst of the business might be gone through as soon as possible.

She could not enter the house again, could not be in the same room to which she had with such vain artifice retreated three months ago, to lace up her boot, without recollecting. A thousand vexatious thoughts would recur, — compliments, charades, and horrible blunders; and it was not to be supposed that poor Harriet should not be recollecting too; but she behaved very well, and was only rather pale and silent. The visit was of course short; and there was so much embarrassment and occupation of mind to shorten it, that Emma would not allow herself entirely to form an opinion of the lady, and on no account to give one, beyond the nothing-meaning terms of being "elegantly dressed, and very pleasing."

She did not really like her. She would not be in a hurry to find fault, but she suspected that there was no elegance; ease, but not elegance. She was almost sure that for a young woman, a stranger, a bride, there was too much ease. Her person was rather good; her face not unpretty; but neither feature nor air nor voice nor manner was elegant. Emma thought, at least, it would turn out so.

As for Mr. Elton, his manners did not appear — But no, she would not permit a hasty or a witty word from herself about his manners. It was an awkward ceremony at any time to be receiving wedding-visits; and a man had need be all grace to acquit himself well through it. The woman was better off; she might have the assistance of fine clothes, and the privilege of bashfulness; but the man had only his own good sense to depend on: and when she considered how peculiarly unlucky poor Mr. Elton was in being in the same room at once with the woman he had just married, the woman he had wanted to marry, and the woman whom he had been expected to marry, she must allow him to have the right to look as little wise and to be as much affectedly and as little really easy as could be.

"Well, Miss Woodhouse," said Harriet, when they had quitted the house, and after waiting in vain for her friend to begin, — "well, Miss Woodhouse," with a gentle sigh, "what do you think of her? Is not she very charming?"

There was a little hesitation in Emma's answer.

"Oh! yes — very — a very pleasing young woman."

"I think her beautiful, quite beautiful."

"Very nicely dressed, indeed; a remarkably elegant gown."

"I am not at all surprised that she should have fallen in love."

"Oh, no; there is nothing to surprise one at all; — a pretty fortune; and she came in his way."

"I dare say," returned Harriet, sighing again, — "I dare say she was very much attached to him."

"Perhaps she might; but it is not every man's fate to marry the woman who loves him best. Miss Hawkins, perhaps, wanted a home, and thought this the best offer she was likely to have."

"Yes," said Harriet, earnestly, "and well she might; nobody could ever have a better. Well, I wish them happy with all my heart. And now, Miss Woodhouse, I do not think I shall mind seeing them again. He is just as superior as ever; but being married, you know, it is quite a different thing. No, indeed, Miss Woodhouse, you need not be afraid; I can sit and admire him now without any great misery. To know that he has not thrown himself away is such a comfort! — She does seem a charming young woman, just what he deserves. Happy creature! He called her 'Augusta.' How delightful!"

When the visit was returned, Emma made up her mind. She could then see more and judge better. From Harriet's happening not to be at Hartfield, and her father's being present to engage Mr. Elton, she had a quarter of an hour of the

lady's conversation to herself, and could composedly attend to her; and the quarter of an hour quite convinced her that Mrs. Elton was a vain woman, extremely well satisfied with herself, and thinking much of her own importance; that she meant to shine and be very superior, but with manners which had been formed in a bad school, pert and familiar; that all her notions were drawn from one set of people and one style of living; that, if not foolish, she was ignorant, and that her society would certainly do Mr. Elton no good.

Harriet would have been a better match. If not wise or refined herself, she would have connected him with those who were; but Miss Hawkins, it might be fairly supposed from her easy conceit, had been the best of her own set. The rich brother-in-law, near Bristol, was the pride of the alliance, and his place and his carriages were the pride of him.

The very first subject, after being seated, was Maple Grove, "My brother Mr. Suckling's seat;" a comparison of Hartfield to Maple Grove. The grounds of Hartfield were small, but neat and pretty; and the house was modern and well-built. Mrs. Elton seemed most favorably impressed by the size of the room, the entrance, and all that she could see or imagine. "Very like Maple Grove indeed! She was quite struck by the likeness! — That room was the very shape and size of the morning-room at Maple Grove; her sister's favorite room." Mr. Elton was appealed to. "Was not it astonishingly like? She could really almost fancy herself at Maple Grove. — And the

staircase. You know, as I came in, I observed how very like the staircase was; placed exactly in the same part of the house. I really could not help exclaiming! I assure you, Miss Woodhouse, it is very delightful to me to be reminded of a place I am so extremely partial to as Maple Grove. I have spent so many happy months there!" with a little sigh of sentiment. "A charming place, undoubtedly. Everybody who sees it is struck by its beauty; but to me it has been quite a home. Whenever you are transplanted, like me, Miss Woodhouse, you will understand how very delightful it is to meet with anything at all like what one has left behind. I always say this is quite one of the evils of matrimony."

Emma made as slight a reply as she could; but it was fully sufficient for Mrs. Elton, who only wanted to be talking herself.

"So extremely like Maple Grove! And it is not merely the house; the grounds, I assure you, as far as I could observe, are strikingly like. The laurels at Maple Grove are in the same profusion as here, and stand very much in the same way, — just across the lawn; and I had a glimpse of a fine large tree, with a bench round it, which put me so exactly in mind! My brother and sister will be enchanted with this place. People who have extensive grounds themselves are always pleased with anything in the same style."

Emma doubted the truth of this sentiment. She had a great idea that people who had extensive grounds themselves cared very little for the extensive grounds of anybody else; but it was not worth

while to attack an error so double-dyed, and she therefore only said in reply, —

"When you have seen more of this country, I am afraid you will think you have over-rated Hartfield. Surrey is full of beauties."

"Oh, yes, I am quite aware of that. It is the garden of England, you know. Surrey is the garden of England."

"Yes; but we must not rest our claims on that distinction. Many counties, I believe, are called the garden of England, as well as Surrey."

"No, I fancy not," replied Mrs. Elton, with a most satisfied smile. "I never heard any county but Surrey called so."

Emma was silenced.

"My brother and sister have promised us a visit in the spring or summer at furthest," continued Mrs. Elton; "and that will be our time for exploring. While they are with us, we shall explore a great deal, I dare say. They will have their barouche-landau, of course, which holds four perfectly; and therefore, without saying anything of our carriage, we should be able to explore the different beauties extremely well. They would hardly come in their chaise, I think, at that season of the year. Indeed, when the time draws on I shall decidedly recommend their bringing the barouche-landau; it will be so very much preferable. When people come into a beautiful country of this sort, you know, Miss Woodhouse, one naturally wishes them to see as much as possible; and Mr. Suckling is extremely fond of exploring. We explored to King's-Weston twice last summer

in that way most delightfully, just after their first having the barouche-landau. You have many parties of that kind here, I suppose, Miss Woodhouse, every summer?"

"No; not immediately here. We are rather out of distance of the very striking beauties which attract the sort of parties you speak of; and we are a very quiet set of people, I believe; more disposed to stay at home than engage in schemes of pleasure."

"Ah! there is nothing like staying at home, for real comfort. Nobody can be more devoted to home than I am. I was quite a proverb for it at Maple Grove. Many a time has Selina said, when she has been going to Bristol, 'I really cannot get this girl to move from the house. I absolutely must go in by myself, though I hate being stuck up in the barouche-landau without a companion; but Augusta, I believe, with her own good-will, would never stir beyond the park paling.' Many a time has she said so; and yet I am no advocate for entire seclusion. I think, on the contrary, when people shut themselves up entirely from society, it is a very bad thing; and that it is much more advisable to mix in the world in a proper degree, without living in it either too much or too little. I perfectly understand your situation, however, Miss Woodhouse," looking towards Mr. Woodhouse; "your father's state of health must be a great drawback. Why does not he try Bath? Indeed he should. Let me recommend Bath to you. I assure you I have no doubt of its doing Mr. Woodhouse good."

"My father tried it more than once, formerly, but without receiving any benefit; and Mr. Perry, whose name I dare say is not unknown to you, does not conceive it would be at all more likely to be useful now."

"Ah! that 's a great pity; for I assure you, Miss Woodhouse, where the waters do agree, it is quite wonderful the relief they give. In my Bath life I have seen such instances of it! And it is so cheerful a place that it could not fail of being of use to Mr. Woodhouse's spirits, which I understand are sometimes much depressed. And as to its recommendation to you, I fancy I need not take much pains to dwell on them. The advantages of Bath to the young are pretty generally understood. It would be a charming introduction for you, who have lived so secluded a life; and I could immediately secure you some of the best society in the place. A line from me would bring you a little host of acquaintance; and my particular friend Mrs. Partridge, the lady I have always resided with when in Bath, would be most happy to show you any attentions, and would be the very person for you to go into public with."

It was as much as Emma could bear, without being impolite. The idea of her being indebted to Mrs. Elton for what was called an introduction, — of her going into public under the auspices of a friend of Mrs. Elton's, — probably some vulgar, dashing widow, who, with the help of a boarder, just made a shift to live! — The dignity of Miss Woodhouse, of Hartfield, was sunk indeed!

She restrained herself, however, from any of the

reproofs she could have given, and only thanked Mrs. Elton coolly; "but their going to Bath was quite out of the question; and she was not perfectly convinced that the place might suit her better than her father." And then, to prevent further outrage and indignation, changed the subject directly.

"I do not ask whether you are musical, Mrs. Elton. Upon these occasions a lady's character generally precedes her; and Highbury has long known that you are a superior performer."

"Oh, no, indeed; I must protest against any such idea. A superior performer! — very far from it, I assure you: consider from how partial a quarter your information came. I am dotingly fond of music, — passionately fond; and my friends say I am not entirely devoid of taste; but as to anything else, upon my honor my performance is *médiocre* to the last degree. You, Miss Woodhouse, I well know, play delightfully. I assure you it has been the greatest satisfaction, comfort, and delight to me, to hear what a musical society I am got into. I absolutely cannot do without music; it is a necessary of life to me; and having always been used to a very musical society, both at Maple Grove and in Bath, it would have been a most serious sacrifice. I honestly said as much to Mr. E. when he was speaking of my future home, and expressing his fears lest the retirement of it should be disagreeable; and the inferiority of the house too — knowing what I had been accustomed to — of course he was not wholly without apprehension. When he was speaking of it in that way, I hon-

estly said that the world I could give up, — parties, balls, plays, — for I have no fear of retirement. Blessed with so many resources within myself, the world was not necessary to me. I could do very well without it. To those who had no resources it was a different thing; but my resources made me quite independent. And as to smaller-sized rooms than I had been used to, I really could not give it a thought. I hoped I was perfectly equal to any sacrifice of that description. Certainly, I had been accustomed to every luxury at Maple Grove; but I did assure him that two carriages were not necessary to my happiness, nor were spacious apartments. 'But,' said I, 'to be quite honest, I do not think I can live without something of a musical society. I condition for nothing else; but, without music, life would be a blank to me.'"

"We cannot suppose," said Emma, smiling, "that Mr. Elton would hesitate to assure you of there being a very musical society in Highbury; and I hope you will not find he has outstepped the truth more than may be pardoned, in consideration of the motive."

"No, indeed, I have no doubts at all on that head. I am delighted to find myself in such a circle: I hope we shall have many sweet little concerts together. I think, Miss Woodhouse, you and I must establish a musical club, and have regular weekly meetings at your house or ours. Will not it be a good plan? If we exert ourselves, I think we shall not be long in want of allies. Something of that nature would be particularly desirable for me, as an inducement to keep

me in practice; for married women, you know — there is a sad story against them, in general. They are but too apt to give up music."

"But you, who are so extremely fond of it, — there can be no danger, surely."

"I should hope not; but really, when I look round among my acquaintance, I tremble. Selina has entirely given up music, — never touches the instrument, though she played sweetly. And the same may be said of Mrs. Jeffereys, — Clara Partridge that was, — and of the two Milmans, now Mrs. Bird and Mrs. James Cooper; and of more than I can enumerate. Upon my word, it is enough to put one in a fright. I used to be quite angry with Selina; but, really, I begin now to comprehend that a married woman has many things to call her attention. I believe I was half an hour this morning shut up with my housekeeper."

"But everything of that kind," said Emma, "will soon be in so regular a train — "

"Well," said Mrs. Elton, laughing, "we shall see."

Emma, finding her so determined upon neglecting her music, had nothing more to say; and after a moment's pause, Mrs. Elton chose another subject.

"We have been calling at Randalls," said she, "and found them both at home; and very pleasant people they seem to be. I like them extremely. Mr. Weston seems an excellent creature, — quite a first-rate favorite with me already, I assure you. And she appears so truly good, — there is something so motherly and kind-hearted about her, that

it wins upon one directly. She was your governess, I think."

Emma was almost too much astonished to answer; but Mrs. Elton hardly waited for the affirmative before she went on.

"Having understood as much, I was rather astonished to find her so very ladylike; but she is really quite the gentlewoman."

"Mrs. Weston's manners," said Emma, "were always particularly good. Their propriety, simplicity, and elegance would make them the safest model for any young woman."

"And who do you think came in while we were there?"

Emma was quite at a loss. The tone implied some old acquaintance, and how could she possibly guess?

"Knightley!" continued Mrs. Elton; "Knightley himself! Was not it lucky? For, not being within when he called the other day, I had never seen him before; and of course, as so particular a friend of Mr. E.'s, I had a great curiosity. 'My friend Knightley' had been so often mentioned, that I was really impatient to see him; and I must do my *caro sposo* the justice to say, that he need not be ashamed of his friend. Knightley is quite the gentleman; I like him very much. Decidedly, I think, a very gentlemanlike man."

Happily, it was now time to be gone. They were off, and Emma could breathe.

"Insufferable woman!" was her immediate exclamation. "Worse than I had supposed. Absolutely insufferable! Knightley! — I could not have

believed it. Knightley! — never seen him in her life before, and call him Knightley! — and discover that he is a gentleman! A little upstart, vulgar being, with her Mr. F. and her *caro sposo*, and her resources, and all her airs of pert pretension and underbred finery. Actually to discover that Mr. Knightley is a gentleman! I doubt whether he will return the compliment, and discover her to be a lady. I could not have believed it! And to propose that she and I should unite to form a musical club! One would fancy we were bosom friends! And Mrs. Weston! — Astonished that the person who had brought me up should be a gentlewoman! Worse and worse. I never met with her equal. Much beyond my hopes. Harriet is disgraced by any comparison. Oh! what would Frank Churchill say to her, if he were here? How angry and how diverted he would be! Ah! there I am — thinking of him directly. Always the first person to be thought of! How I catch myself out! Frank Churchill comes as regularly into my mind — "

All this ran so glibly through her thoughts, that by the time her father had arranged himself, after the bustle of the Eltons' departure, and was ready to speak, she was very tolerably capable of attending.

"Well, my dear," he deliberately began, "considering we never saw her before, she seems a very pretty sort of young lady; and I dare say she was very much pleased with you. She speaks a little too quick. A little quickness of voice there is which rather hurts the ear. But I believe I am nice; I do not like strange voices; and nobody

speaks like you and poor Miss Taylor. However, she seems a very obliging, pretty-behaved young lady, and no doubt will make him a very good wife. Though I think he had better not have married. I made the best excuses I could for not having been able to wait on him and Mrs. Elton on this happy occasion; I said that I hoped I should in the course of the summer. But I ought to have gone before. Not to wait upon a bride is very remiss. Ah! it shows what a sad invalid I am! — But I do not like the corner into Vicarage Lane."

"I dare say your apologies were accepted, sir. Mr. Elton knows you."

"Yes; but a young lady — a bride — I ought to have paid my respects to her if possible. It was being very deficient."

"But, my dear papa, you are no friend to matrimony; and therefore why should you be so anxious to pay your respects to a bride? It ought to be no recommendation to you. It is encouraging people to marry if you make so much of them."

"No, my dear, I never encouraged anybody to marry, but I would always wish to pay every proper attention to a lady — and a bride, especially, is never to be neglected. More is avowedly due to her. A bride, you know, my dear, is always the first in company, let the others be who they m. '

"Wel papa, if this is not encouragement to marry, I do not know what is; and I should never have expected you to be lending your sanction to such vanity-baits for poor young ladies."

"My dear, you do not understand me. This is a matter of mere common politeness and good breeding, and has nothing to do with any encouragement to people to marry."

Emma had done. Her father was growing nervous, and could not understand her. Her mind returned to Mrs. Elton's offences; and long, very long, did they occupy her.

CHAPTER V.

EMMA was not required, by any subsequent discovery, to retract her ill opinion of Mrs. Elton. Her observation had been pretty correct. Such as Mrs. Elton appeared to her on this second interview, such she appeared whenever they met again, —self-important, presuming, familiar, ignorant, and ill-bred. She had a little beauty and a little accomplishment, but so little judgment that she thought herself coming with superior knowledge of the world, to enliven and improve a country neighborhood; and conceived Miss Hawkins to have held such a place in society as Mrs. Elton's consequence only could surpass.

There was no reason to suppose Mr. Elton thought at all differently from his wife. He seemed not merely happy with her, but proud. He had the air of congratulating himself on having brought such a woman to Highbury as not even Miss Woodhouse could equal; and the greater part of her new acquaintance, disposed to commend, or not in the habit of judging, following the lead of Miss Bates's good-will, or taking it for granted that the bride must be as clever and as agreeable as she professed herself, were very well satisfied; so that Mrs. Elton's praise passed from one mouth to another as it ought to do, unimpeded by Miss

Woodhouse, who readily continued her first contribution, and talked with a good grace of her being "very pleasant and very elegantly dressed."

In one respect Mrs. Elton grew even worse than she had appeared at first. Her feelings altered towards Emma. — Offended, probably, by the little encouragement which her proposals of intimacy met with, she drew back, in her turn, and gradually became much more cold and distant; and though the effect was agreeable, the ill-will which produced it was necessarily increasing Emma's dislike. Her manners too, and Mr. Elton's were unpleasant towards Harriet. They were sneering and negligent. Emma hoped it must rapidly work Harriet's cure; but the sensations which could prompt such behavior sunk them both very much. — It was not to be doubted that poor Harriet's attachment had been an offering to conjugal unreserve; and her own share in the story, under a coloring the least favorable to her and the most soothing to him, had in all likelihood been given also. She was, of course, the object of their joint dislike. — When they had nothing else to say, it must be always easy to begin abusing Miss Woodhouse; and the enmity which they dared not show in open disrespect to her, found a broader vent in contemptuous treatment of Harriet.

Mrs. Elton took a great fancy to Jane Fairfax; and from the first, — not merely when a state of warfare with one young lady might be supposed to recommend the other, but from the very first; and she was not satisfied with expressing a natural and reasonable admiration, but without solicita-

tion or plea or privilege, she must be wanting to assist and befriend her. Before Emma had forfeited her confidence, and about the third time of their meeting, she heard all Mrs. Elton's knight-errantry on the subject.

"Jane Fairfax is absolutely charming, Miss Woodhouse. — I quite rave about Jane Fairfax. — A sweet, interesting creature. So mild and lady-like — and with such talents! — I assure you I think she has very extraordinary talents. I do not scruple to say that she plays extremely well. I know enough of music to speak decidedly on that point. Oh! she is absolutely charming! You will laugh at my warmth — but, upon my word, I talk of nothing but Jane Fairfax. — And her situation is so calculated to affect one! — Miss Woodhouse, we must exert ourselves and endeavor to do something for her. We must bring her forward. Such talents as hers must not be suffered to remain unknown. — I dare say you have heard those charming lines of the poet, —

> Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
> And waste its fragrance on the desert air.

We must not allow them to be verified in sweet Jane Fairfax."

"I cannot think there is any danger of it," was Emma's calm answer; "and when you are better acquainted with Miss Fairfax's situation, and understand what her home has been with Colonel and Mrs. Campbell, I have no idea that you will suppose her talents can be unknown."

"Oh! but, dear Miss Woodhouse, she is now in

such retirement, such obscurity, so thrown away! Whatever advantages she may have enjoyed with the Campbells are so palpably at an end! And I think she feels it. I am sure she does. She is very timid and silent. One can see that she feels the want of encouragement. I like her the better for it. I must confess it is a recommendation to me. I am a great advocate for timidity — and I am sure one does not often meet with it. But in those who are at all inferior, it is extremely prepossessing. Oh! I assure you, Jane Fairfax is a very delightful character, and interests me more than I can express."

"You appear to feel a great deal, — but I am not aware how you or any of Miss Fairfax's acquaintance here, any of those who have known her longer than yourself, can show her any other attention than —"

"My dear Miss Woodhouse, a vast deal may be done by those who dare to act. You and I need not be afraid. If we set the example, many will follow it as far as they can; though all have not our situations. We have carriages to fetch and convey her home; and we live in a style which could not make the addition of Jane Fairfax at any time the least inconvenient. I should be extremely displeased if Wright were to send us up such a dinner as could make me regret having asked more than Jane Fairfax to partake of it. I have no idea of that sort of thing. It is not likely that I should, considering what I have been used to. My greatest danger, perhaps, in housekeeping may be quite the other way, in doing too

much and being too careless of expense. Maple Grove will probably be my model more than it ought to be, — for we do not at all affect to equal my brother, Mr. Suckling, in income. However, my resolution is taken as to noticing Jane Fairfax. I shall certainly have her very often at my house, shall introduce her wherever I can, shall have musical parties to draw out her talents, and shall be constantly on the watch for an eligible situation. My acquaintance is so very extensive that I have little doubt of hearing of something to suit her shortly. I shall introduce her, of course, very particularly to my brother and sister when they come to us. I am sure they will like her extremely; and when she gets a little acquainted with them, her fears will completely wear off, for there really is nothing in the manners of either but what is highly conciliating. I shall have her very often indeed while they are with me; and I dare say we shall sometimes find a seat for her in the barouche-landau in some of our exploring parties."

"Poor Jane Fairfax!" thought Emma, "you have not deserved this. You may have done wrong with regard to Mr. Dixon; but this is a punishment beyond what you can have merited! The kindness and protection of Mrs. Elton! — 'Jane Fairfax and Jane Fairfax.' Heavens! let me not suppose that she dares go about Emma Woodhouse-ing me! But, upon my honor, there seem no limits to the licentiousness of that woman's tongue!"

Emma had not to listen to such paradings again,

— to any so exclusively addressed to herself, so disgustingly decorated with a "dear Miss Woodhouse." The change on Mrs. Elton's side soon afterwards appeared, and she was left in peace, — neither forced to be the very particular friend of Mrs. Elton, nor under Mrs. Elton's guidance the very active patroness of Jane Fairfax, and only sharing with others in a general way, in knowing what was felt, what was meditated, what was done.

She looked on with some amusement. Miss Bates's gratitude for Mrs. Elton's attentions to Jane was in the first style of guileless simplicity and warmth. She was quite one of her worthies, — the most amiable, affable, delightful woman, — just as accomplished and condescending as Mrs. Elton meant to be considered. Emma's only surprise was that Jane Fairfax should accept those attentions and tolerate Mrs. Elton as she seemed to do. She heard of her walking with the Eltons, sitting with the Eltons, spending a day with the Eltons! This was astonishing! She could not have believed it possible that the taste or the pride of Miss Fairfax could endure such society and friendship as the Vicarage had to offer.

"She is a riddle, quite a riddle," said she. "To choose to remain here month after month, under privations of every sort; and now to choose the mortification of Mrs. Elton's notice and the penury of her conversation rather than return to the superior companions who have always loved her with such real, generous affection!"

Jane had come to Highbury professedly for

three months; the Campbells were gone to Ireland for three months: but now the Campbells had promised their daughter to stay at least till midsummer, and fresh invitations had arrived for her to join them there. According to Miss Bates — it all came from her — Mrs. Dixon had written most pressingly. Would Jane but go, means were to be found, servants sent, friends contrived, — no travelling difficulty allowed to exist; but still she had declined it.

"She must have some motive, more powerful than appears, for refusing this invitation," was Emma's conclusion. "She must be under some sort of penance inflicted either by the Campbells or herself. There is great fear, great caution, great resolution somewhere. She is not to be with the Dixons. The decree is issued by somebody. But why must she consent to be with the Eltons? Here is quite a separate puzzle."

Upon her speaking her wonder aloud on that part of the subject before the few who knew her opinion of Mrs. Elton, Mrs. Weston ventured this apology for Jane.

"We cannot suppose that she has any great enjoyment at the Vicarage, my dear Emma; but it is better than being always at home. Her aunt is a good creature; but, as a constant companion, must be very tiresome. We must consider what Miss Fairfax quits, before we condemn her taste for what she goes to."

"You are right, Mrs. Weston," said Mr. Knightley, warmly. "Miss Fairfax is as capable as any of us of forming a just opinion of Mrs.

Elton. Could she have chosen with whom to associate, she would not have chosen her. But," with a reproachful smile at Emma, "she receives attentions from Mrs. Elton which nobody else pays her."

Emma felt that Mrs. Weston was giving her a momentary glance, and she was herself struck by his warmth. With a faint blush she presently replied, —

"Such attentions as Mrs. Elton's, I should have imagined, would rather disgust than gratify Miss Fairfax. Mrs. Elton's invitations I should have imagined anything but inviting."

"I should not wonder," said Mrs. Weston, "if Miss Fairfax were to have been drawn on beyond her own inclination by her aunt's eagerness in accepting Mrs. Elton's civilities for her. Poor Miss Bates may very likely have committed her niece, and hurried her into a greater appearance of intimacy than her own good sense would have dictated in spite of the very natural wish of a little change."

Both felt rather anxious to hear him speak again; and after a few minutes' silence he said, —

"Another thing must be taken into consideration too, — Mrs. Elton does not talk to Miss Fairfax as she speaks of her. We all know the difference between the pronouns *he* or *she* and *thou*, the plainest spoken amongst us; we all feel the influence of a something beyond common civility in our personal intercourse with each other, — a something more early implanted. We cannot give

anybody the disagreeable hints that we may have been very full of the hour before. We feel things differently. And besides the operation of this, as a general principle, you may be sure that Miss Fairfax awes Mrs. Elton by her superiority both of mind and manner; and that, face to face, Mrs. Elton treats her with all the respect which she has a claim to. Such a woman as Jane Fairfax probably never fell in Mrs. Elton's way before; and no degree of vanity can prevent her acknowledging her own comparative littleness in action, if not in consciousness."

"I know how highly you think of Jane Fairfax," said Emma. Little Henry was in her thoughts, and a mixture of alarm and delicacy made her irresolute what else to say.

"Yes," he replied, "anybody may know how highly I think of her."

"And yet," said Emma, beginning hastily and with an arch look, but soon stopping, — it was better, however, to know the worst at once, — she hurried on, "and yet, perhaps, you may hardly be aware yourself how highly it is. The extent of your admiration may take you by surprise some day or other."

Mr. Knightley was hard at work upon the lower buttons of his thick leather gaiters; and either the exertion of getting them together, or some other cause, brought the color into his face, as he answered,—

"Oh! are you there? But you are miserably behindhand. Mr. Cole gave me a hint of it six weeks ago."

He stopped. Emma felt her foot pressed by Mrs. Weston, and did not herself know what to think. In a moment he went on, —

"That will never be, however, I can assure you. Miss Fairfax, I dare say, would not have me if I were to ask her; and I am very sure I shall never ask her."

Emma returned her friend's pressure with interest, and was pleased enough to exclaim,—

"You are not vain, Mr. Knightley. I will say that for you."

He seemed hardly to hear her; he was thoughtful, and, in a manner which showed him not pleased, soon afterwards said, —

"So you have been settling that I should marry Jane Fairfax."

"No, indeed, I have not. You have scolded me too much for matchmaking for me to presume to take such a liberty with you. What I said just now meant nothing. One says those sort of things, of course, without any idea of a serious meaning. Oh, no; upon my word I have not the smallest wish for your marrying Jane Fairfax or Jane anybody. You would not come in and sit with us in this comfortable way if you were married."

Mr. Knightley was thoughtful again. The result of his reverie was: "No, Emma, I do not think the extent of my admiration for her will ever take me by surprise. I never had a thought of her in that way, I assure you." And, soon afterwards: "Jane Fairfax is a very charming young woman; but not even Jane Fairfax

is perfect. She has a fault. She has not the open temper which a man would wish for in a wife."

Emma could not but rejoice to hear that she had a fault.

"Well," said she, "and you soon silenced Mr. Cole, I suppose."

"Yes, very soon. He gave me a quiet hint; I told him he was mistaken; he asked my pardon, and said no more. Cole does not want to be wiser or wittier than his neighbors."

"In that respect how unlike dear Mrs. Elton, who wants to be wiser and wittier than all the world! I wonder how she speaks of the Coles, — what she calls them. How can she find any appellation for them deep enough in familiar vulgarity? She calls you Knightley; what can she do for Mr. Cole? And so I am not to be surprised that Jane Fairfax accepts her civilities, and consents to be with her. Mrs. Weston, your argument weighs most with me. I can much more readily enter into the temptation of getting away from Miss Bates, than I can believe in the triumph of Miss Fairfax's mind over Mrs. Elton. I have no faith in Mrs. Elton's acknowledging herself the inferior in thought, word, or deed; or in her being under any restraint beyond her own scanty rule of good breeding. I cannot imagine that she will not be continually insulting her visitor with praise, encouragement, and offers of service; that she will not be continually detailing her magnificent intentions, from the procuring her a permanent situation to the including

her in those delightful exploring parties which are to take place in the barouche-landau."

"Jane Fairfax has feeling," said Mr. Knightley; "I do not accuse her of want of feeling. Her sensibilities, I suspect, are strong, and her temper excellent in its power of forbearance, patience, self-control; but it wants openness. She is reserved, — more reserved, I think, than she used to be; and I love an open temper. No; till Cole alluded to my supposed attachment, it had never entered my head. I saw Jane Fairfax, and conversed with her, with admiration and pleasure always, but with no thought beyond."

"Well, Mrs. Weston," said Emma, triumphantly, when he left them, "what do you say now to Mr. Knightley's marrying Jane Fairfax?"

"Why, really, dear Emma, I say that he is so very much occupied by the idea of not being in love with her, that I should not wonder if it were to end in his being so at last. Do not beat me."

CHAPTER VI.

EVERYBODY in and about Highbury who had ever visited Mr. Elton was disposed to pay him attention on his marriage. Dinner-parties and evening parties were made for him and his lady; and invitations flowed in so fast that she had soon the pleasure of apprehending they were never to have a disengaged day.

"I see how it is," said she; "I see what a life I am to lead among you. Upon my word we shall be absolutely dissipated. We really seem quite the fashion. If this is living in the country, it is nothing very formidable. From Monday next to Saturday, I assure you we have not a disengaged day! A woman with fewer resources than I have need not have been at a loss."

No invitation came amiss to her. Her Bath habits made evening parties perfectly natural to her, and Maple Grove had given her a taste for dinners. She was a little shocked at the want of two drawing-rooms, at the poor attempt at rout-cakes, and there being no ice in the Highbury card-parties. Mrs. Bates, Mrs. Perry, Mrs. Goddard, and others were a good deal behindhand in knowledge of the world, but she would soon show them how everything ought to be ar-

ranged. In the course of the spring she must return their civilities by one very superior party; in which her card-tables should be set out with their separate candles and unbroken packs in the true style, and more waiters engaged for the evening than their own establishment could furnish, to carry round the refreshments at exactly the proper hour and in the proper order.

Emma, in the mean while, could not be satisfied without a dinner at Hartfield for the Eltons. They must not do less than others, or she should be exposed to odious suspicions, and imagined capable of pitiful resentment. A dinner there must be. After Emma had talked about it for ten minutes, Mr. Woodhouse felt no unwillingness, and only made the usual stipulation of not sitting at the bottom of the table himself, with the usual regular difficulty of deciding who should do it for him.

The persons to be invited required little thought. Besides the Eltons, it must be the Westons and Mr. Knightley; so far it was all of course: and it was hardly less inevitable that poor little Harriet must be asked to make the eighth; but this invitation was not given with equal satisfaction, and on many accounts Emma was particularly pleased by Harriet's begging to be allowed to decline it. "She would rather not be in his company more than she could help. She was not quite able to see him and his charming happy wife together, without feeling uncomfortable. If Miss Woodhouse would not be displeased, she would rather stay at home." It was

precisely what Emma would have wished, had she deemed it possible enough for wishing. She was delighted with the fortitude of her little friend, — for fortitude she knew it was in her to give up being in company, and stay at home; and she could now invite the very person whom she really wanted to make the eighth, Jane Fairfax. Since her last conversation with Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley she was more conscience-stricken about Jane Fairfax than she had often been. Mr. Knightley's words dwelt with her. He had said that Jane Fairfax received attentions from Mrs. Elton which nobody else paid her.

"This is very true," said she, "at least as far as relates to me, which was all that was meant, and it is very shameful. Of the same age, and always knowing her, I ought to have been more her friend. She will never like me now. I have neglected her too long. But I will show her greater attention than I have done."

Every invitation was successful. They were all disengaged and all happy. The preparatory interest of this dinner, however, was not yet over. A circumstance rather unlucky occurred. The two eldest little Knightleys were engaged to pay their grandpapa and aunt a visit of some weeks in the spring, and their papa now proposed bringing them, and staying one whole day at Hartfield, — which one day would be the very day of this party. His professional engagements did not allow of his being put off, but both father and daughter were disturbed by its happening so. Mr. Woodhouse con-

sidered eight persons at dinner together as the utmost that his nerves could bear; and here would be a ninth, — and Emma apprehended that it would be a ninth very much out of humor at not being able to come even to Hartfield for forty-eight hours without falling in with a dinner-party.

She comforted her father better than she could comfort herself, by representing that though he certainly would make them nine, yet he always said so little that the increase of noise would be very immaterial. She thought it in reality a sad exchange for herself, to have him, with his grave looks and reluctant conversation, opposed to her instead of his brother.

The event was more favorable to Mr. Woodhouse than to Emma. John Knightley came; but Mr. Weston was unexpectedly summoned to town, and must be absent on the very day. He might be able to join them in the evening, but certainly not to dinner. Mr. Woodhouse was quite at ease; and the seeing him so, with the arrival of the little boys and the philosophic composure of her brother on hearing his fate, removed the chief of even Emma's vexation.

The day came, the party were punctually assembled, and Mr. John Knightley seemed early to devote himself to the business of being agreeable. Instead of drawing his brother off to a window while they waited for dinner, he was talking to Miss Fairfax. Mrs. Elton, as elegant as lace and pearls could make her, he looked at in silence, — wanting only to observe enough for Isabella's information, — but Miss Fairfax was an old acquaint-

ance and a quiet girl, and he could talk to her. He had met her before breakfast as he was returning from a walk with his little boys, when it had been just beginning to rain. It was natural to have some civil hopes on the subject, and he said, —

"I hope you did not venture far, Miss Fairfax, this morning, or I am sure you must have been wet. We scarcely got home in time. I hope you turned directly."

"I went only to the post-office," said she, "and reached home before the rain was much. It is my daily errand; I always fetch the letters when I am here. It saves trouble, and is a something to get me out. A walk before breakfast does me good."

"Not a walk in the rain I should imagine."

"No; but it did not absolutely rain when I set out."

Mr. John Knightley smiled and replied, —

"That is to say, you chose to have your walk, for you were not six yards from your own door when I had the pleasure of meeting you; and Henry and John had seen more drops than they could count long before. The post-office has a great charm at one period of our lives. When you have lived to my age, you will begin to think letters are never worth going through the rain for."

There was a little blush, and then this answer, —

"I must not hope to be ever situated as you are, in the midst of every dearest connection, and therefore I cannot expect that simply growing older should make me indifferent about letters."

"Indifferent! Oh, no, — I never conceived you could become indifferent. Letters are no matter of indifference; they are generally a very positive curse."

"You are speaking of letters of business; mine are letters of friendship."

"I have often thought them the worst of the two," replied he, coolly. "Business, you know, may bring money, but friendship hardly ever does."

"Ah! you are not serious now. I know Mr. John Knightley too well, — I am very sure he understands the value of friendship as well as anybody. I can easily believe that letters are very little to you, much less than to me; but it is not your being ten years older than myself which makes the difference, — it is not age, but situation. You have everybody dearest to you always at hand; I, probably, never shall again; and therefore till I have outlived all my affections, a post-office, I think, must always have power to draw me out, in worse weather than to-day."

"When I talked of your being altered by time, by the progress of years," said John Knightley, "I meant to imply the change of situation which time usually brings. I consider one as including the other. Time will generally lessen the interest of every attachment not within the daily circle, — but that is not the change I had in view for you. As an old friend, you will allow me to hope, Miss Fairfax, that ten years hence you may have as many concentrated objects as I have."

It was kindly said, and very far from giving

offence. A pleasant "Thank you" seemed meant to laugh it off; but a blush, a quivering lip, a tear in the eye, showed that it was felt beyond a laugh. Her attention was now claimed by Mr. Woodhouse, who being, according to his custom on such occasions, making the circle of his guests, and paying his particular compliments to the ladies, was ending with her, and with all his mildest urbanity, said, —

"I am very sorry to hear, Miss Fairfax, of your being out this morning in the rain. Young ladies should take care of themselves. Young ladies are delicate plants. They should take care of their health and their complexion. My dear, did you change your stockings?"

"Yes, sir, I did indeed; and I am very much obliged by your kind solicitude about me!"

"My dear Miss Fairfax, young ladies are very sure to be cared for. — I hope your good grandmamma and aunt are well. They are some of my very old friends. I wish my health allowed me to be a better neighbor. You do us a great deal of honor to-day, I am sure. My daughter and I are both highly sensible of your goodness, and have the greatest satisfaction in seeing you at Hartfield."

The kind-hearted, polite old man might then sit down and feel that he had done his duty, and made every fair lady welcome and easy.

By this time the walk in the rain had reached Mrs. Elton, and her remonstrances now opened upon Jane.

"My dear Jane, what is this I hear? — Going to the post-office in the rain! — This must not be,

I assure you. You sad girl, how could you do such a thing? It is a sign I was not there to take care of you."

Jane very patiently assured her that she had not caught any cold.

"Oh, do not tell me! You really are a very sad girl, and do not know how to take care of yourself. To the post-office indeed! Mrs. Weston, did you ever hear the like? You and I must positively exert our authority."

"My advice," said Mrs. Weston, kindly and persuasively, "I certainly do feel tempted to give. Miss Fairfax, you must not run such risks. Liable as you have been to severe colds, indeed you ought to be particularly careful, especially at this time of year. The spring I always think requires more than common care. Better wait an hour or two, or even half a day for your letters, than run the risk of bringing on your cough again. Now do not you feel that you had? Yes, I am sure you are much too reasonable. You look as if you would not do such a thing again."

"Oh! she shall not do such a thing again," eagerly rejoined Mrs. Elton. "We will not allow her to do such a thing again;" and nodding significantly, "there must be some arrangement made,—there must indeed. I shall speak to Mr. E. The man who fetches our letters every morning (one of our men, I forget his name) shall inquire for yours too, and bring them to you. That will obviate all difficulties, you know; and from us I really think, my dear Jane, you can have no scruple to accept such an accommodation."

"You are extremely kind," said Jane; "but I cannot give up my early walk. I am advised to be out of doors as much as I can; I must walk somewhere, and the post-office is an object; and, upon my word, I have scarcely ever had a bad morning before."

"My dear Jane, say no more about it. The thing is determined, that is," laughing affectedly, "as far as I can presume to determine anything without the concurrence of my lord and master. You know, Mrs. Weston, you and I must be cautious how we express ourselves. But I do flatter myself, my dear Jane, that my influence is not entirely worn out. If I meet with no insuperable difficulties, therefore, consider that point as settled."

"Excuse me," said Jane, earnestly, "I cannot by any means consent to such an arrangement, so needlessly troublesome to your servant. If the errand were not a pleasure to me, it could be done, as it always is when I am not here, by my grandmamma's."

"Oh! my dear; but so much as Patty has to do! — And it is a kindness to employ our men."

Jane looked as if she did not mean to be conquered; but instead of answering, she began speaking again to Mr. John Knightley.

"The post-office is a wonderful establishment!" said she. "The regularity and despatch of it! If one thinks of all that it has to do, and all that it does so well, it is really astonishing!"

"It is certainly very well regulated."

"So seldom that any negligence or blunder

appears! So seldom that a letter, among the thousands that are constantly passing about the kingdom, is even carried wrong, — and not one in a million, I suppose, actually lost! And when one considers the variety of hands and of bad hands too, that are to be deciphered, it increases the wonder."

"The clerks grow expert from habit. They must begin with some quickness of sight and hand, and exercise improves them. If you want any further explanation," continued he, smiling, "they are paid for it. That is the key to a great deal of capacity. The public pays and must be served well."

The varieties of handwriting were further talked of, and the usual observations made.

"I have heard it asserted," said John Knightley, "that the same sort of handwriting often prevails in a family; and where the same master teaches, it is natural enough. But for that reason I should imagine the likeness must be chiefly confined to the females, for boys have very little teaching after an early age, and scramble into any hand they can get. Isabella and Emma, I think, do write very much alike. I have not always known their writing apart."

"Yes," said his brother, hesitatingly, "there is a likeness. I know what you mean, — but Emma's hand is the strongest."

"Isabella and Emma both write beautifully," said Mr. Woodhouse, "and always did; and so does poor Mrs. Weston," — with half a sigh and half a smile at her.

"I never saw any gentleman's handwriting," Emma began, looking also at Mrs. Weston; but stopped, on perceiving that Mrs. Weston was attending to some one else, — and the pause gave her time to reflect. "Now, how am I going to introduce him? Am I unequal to speaking his name at once before all these people? Is it necessary for me to use any roundabout phrase? Your Yorkshire friend, your correspondent in Yorkshire, — that will be the way, I suppose, if I were very bad. No, I can pronounce his name without the smallest distress. I certainly get better and better. Now for it!"

Mrs. Weston was disengaged, and Emma began again, —

"Mr. Frank Churchill writes one of the best gentlemen's hands I ever saw."

"I do not admire it," said Mr. Knightley. "It is too small, — wants strength. It is like a woman's writing."

This was not submitted to by either lady. They vindicated him against the base aspersion. "No, it by no means wanted strength, — it was not a large hand, but very clear and certainly strong. Had not Mrs. Weston any letter about her to produce?" No, she had heard from him very lately, but having answered the letter, had put it away.

"If we were in the other room," said Emma, — "if I had my writing-desk, I am sure I could produce a specimen. I have a note of his. — Do not you remember, Mrs. Weston, employing him to write for you one day?"

"He chose to say he was employed."

"Well, well, I have that note, and can show it after dinner, to convince Mr. Knightley."

"Oh, when a gallant young man, like Mr. Frank Churchill," said Mr. Knightley, dryly, "writes to a fair lady like Miss Woodhouse, he will, of course, put forth his best."

Dinner was on table. Mrs. Elton, before she could be spoken to, was ready; and before Mr. Woodhouse had reached her with his request to be allowed to hand her into the dining-parlor, was saying, —

"Must I go first? I really am ashamed of always leading the way."

Jane's solicitude about fetching her own letters had not escaped Emma. She had heard and seen it all, and felt some curiosity to know whether the wet walk of this morning had produced any. She suspected that it had; that it would not have been so resolutely encountered but in full expectation of hearing from some one very dear, and that it had not been in vain. She thought there was an air of greater happiness than usual, — a glow both of complexion and spirits.

She could have made an inquiry or two, as to the expedition and the expense of the Irish mails, — it was at her tongue's end, — but she abstained. She was quite determined not to utter a word that should hurt Jane Fairfax's feelings; and they followed the other ladies out of the room, arm in arm, with an appearance of good-will highly becoming to the beauty and grace of each.

CHAPTER VII.

When the ladies returned to the drawing-room after dinner, Emma found it hardly possible to prevent their making two distinct parties, — with so much perseverance in judging and behaving ill did Mrs. Elton engross Jane Fairfax and slight herself. She and Mrs. Weston were obliged to be almost always either talking together or silent together. Mrs. Elton left them no choice. If Jane repressed her for a little time, she soon began again; and though much that passed between them was in a half-whisper, especially on Mrs. Elton's side, there was no avoiding a knowledge of their principal subjects: the post-office, catching cold, fetching letters, and friendship were long under discussion; and to them succeeded one which must be at least equally unpleasant to Jane, — inquiries whether she had yet heard of any situation likely to suit her, and professions of Mrs. Elton's meditated activity.

"Here is April come!" said she; "I get quite anxious about you. June will soon be here."

"But I have never fixed on June or any other month, — merely looked forward to the summer in general."

"But have you really heard of nothing?"

"I have not even made any inquiry; I do not wish to make any yet."

"Oh! my dear, we cannot begin too early; you are not aware of the difficulty of procuring exactly the desirable thing."

"I not aware!" said Jane, shaking her head; "dear Mrs. Elton, who can have thought of it as I have done?"

"But you have not seen so much of the world as I have. You do not know how many candidates there always are for the first situations. I saw a vast deal of that in the neighborhood round Maple Grove. A cousin of Mr. Suckling, Mrs. Bragge, had such an infinity of applications; everybody was anxious to be in her family, for she moves in the first circle. Wax-candles in the school-room! You may imagine how desirable! Of all houses in the kingdom, Mrs. Bragge's is the one I would most wish to see you in."

"Colonel and Mrs. Campbell are to be in town again by midsummer," said Jane. "I must spend some time with them; I am sure they will want it; — afterwards I may probably be glad to dispose of myself. But I would not wish you to take the trouble of making any inquiries at present."

"Trouble! ay, I know your scruples. You are afraid of giving me trouble; but I assure you, my dear Jane, the Campbells can hardly be more interested about you than I am. I shall write to Mrs. Partridge in a day or two, and shall give her a strict charge to be on the lookout for anything eligible."

"Thank you, but I would rather you did not mention the subject to her; till the time draws nearer, I do not wish to be giving anybody trouble."

"But, my dear child, the time is drawing near; here is April, and June, or say even July, is very near, with such business to accomplish before us. Your inexperience really amuses me! A situation such as you deserve, and your friends would require for you, is no every-day occurrence, is not obtained at a moment's notice; indeed, indeed, we must begin inquiring directly."

"Excuse me, ma'am, but this is by no means my intention; I make no inquiry myself, and should be sorry to have any made by my friends. When I am quite determined as to the time, I am not at all afraid of being long unemployed. There are places in town, offices, where inquiry would soon produce something, — offices for the sale, not quite of human flesh, but of human intellect."

"Oh, my dear! human flesh! You quite shock me; if you mean a fling at the slave-trade, I assure you Mr. Suckling was always rather a friend to the abolition."

"I did not mean, I was not thinking of the slave-trade," replied Jane; "governess-trade, I assure you, was all that I had in view, — widely different certainly as to the guilt of those who carry it on; but as to the greater misery of the victims, I do not know where it lies. But I only mean to say that there are advertising offices, and that by applying to them I should have no doubt of very soon meeting with something that would do."

"Something that would do!" repeated Mrs. Elton. "Ay, that may suit your humble ideas of yourself, — I know what a modest creature you are; but it will not satisfy your friends to have you taking up with anything that may offer, any inferior common-place situation, in a family not moving in a certain circle, or able to command the elegances of life."

"You are very obliging; but as to all that I am very indifferent. It would be no object to me to be with the rich: my mortifications, I think, would only be the greater; I should suffer more from comparison. A gentleman's family is all that I should condition for."

"I know you, I know you, — you would take up with anything; but I shall be a little more nice, and I am sure the good Campbells will be quite on my side; with your superior talents you have a right to move in the first circle. Your musical knowledge alone would entitle you to name your own terms, have as many rooms as you like, and mix in the family as much as you chose; that is —I do not know — if you knew the harp, you might do all that, I am very sure; but you sing as well as play; — yes, I really believe you might, even without the harp, stipulate for what you chose; and you must and shall be delightfully, honorably, and comfortably settled before the Campbells or I have any rest."

"You may well class the delight, the honor, and the comfort of such a situation together," said Jane, — "they are pretty sure to be equal; however, I am very serious in not wishing anything to be

attempted at present for me. I am exceedingly obliged to you, Mrs. Elton, I am obliged to anybody who feels for me, but I am quite serious in wishing nothing to be done till the summer. For two or three months longer I shall remain where I am and as I am."

"And I am quite serious too, I assure you," replied Mrs. Elton, gayly, "in resolving to be always on the watch, and employing my friends to watch also, that nothing really unexceptionable may pass us."

In this style she ran on, never thoroughly stopped by anything till Mr. Woodhouse came into the room; her vanity had then a change of object, and Emma heard her saying in the same half-whisper to Jane, —

"Here comes this dear old beau of mine, I protest! Only think of his gallantry in coming away before the other men! — what a dear creature he is! — I assure you I like him excessively. I admire all that quaint, old-fashioned politeness; it is much more to my taste than modern ease, — modern ease often disgusts me. But this good old Mr. Woodhouse, I wish you had heard his gallant speeches to me at dinner. Oh! I assure you I began to think my *caro sposo* would be absolutely jealous. I fancy I am rather a favorite; he took notice of my gown. How do you like it? Selina's choice, — handsome, I think, but I do not know whether it is not over-trimmed; I have the greatest dislike to the idea of being over-trimmed, — quite a horror of finery. I must put on a few ornaments now, because it is expected of me. A bride, you know,

must appear like a bride, but my natural taste is all for simplicity; a simple style of dress is so infinitely preferable to finery. But I am quite in the minority, I believe; few people seem to value simplicity of dress, — show and finery are everything. I have some notion of putting such a trimming as this to my white and silver poplin. Do you think it will look well?"

The whole party were but just reassembled in the drawing-room when Mr. Weston made his appearance among them. He had returned to a late dinner, and walked to Hartfield as soon as it was over. He had been too much expected by the best judges for surprise, — but there was great joy. Mr. Woodhouse was almost as glad to see him now as he would have been sorry to see him before. John Knightley only was in mute astonishment. That a man who might have spent his evening quietly at home after a day of business in London should set off again and walk half a mile to another man's house for the sake of being in mixed company till bedtime, of finishing his day in the efforts of civility and the noise of numbers, was a circumstance to strike him deeply. A man who had been in motion since eight o'clock in the morning, and might now have been still, — who had been long talking and might have been silent, — who had been in more than one crowd, and might have been alone! — Such a man to quit the tranquillity and independence of his own fireside, and on the evening of a cold sleety April day rush out again into the world! — Could he by a touch of his finger have instantly taken back his wife,

there would have been a motive; but his coming would probably prolong rather than break up the party. John Knightley looked at him with amazement, then shrugged his shoulders, and said, "I could not have believed it even of him."

Mr. Weston meanwhile, perfectly unsuspicious of the indignation he was exciting, happy and cheerful as usual, and with all the right of being principal talker, which a day spent anywhere from home confers, was making himself agreeable among the rest; and having satisfied the inquiries of his wife as to his dinner, convincing her that none of all her careful directions to the servants had been forgotten, and spread abroad what public news he had heard, was proceeding to a family communication which, though principally addressed to Mrs. Weston, he had not the smallest doubt of being highly interesting to everybody in the room. He gave her a letter, — it was from Frank, and to herself; he had met with it in his way, and had taken the liberty of opening it.

"Read it, read it," said he, — "it will give you pleasure; only a few lines, — will not take you long; read it to Emma."

The two ladies looked over it together; and he sat smiling and talking to them the whole time, in a voice a little subdued, but very audible to everybody.

"Well, he is coming, you see; good news, I think. Well, what do you say to it? I always told you he would be here again soon, did not I? Anne, my dear, did not I always tell you so, and

you would not believe me? In town next week, you see, — at the latest, I dare say; for she is as impatient as the black gentleman when anything is to be done; most likely they will be there to-morrow or Saturday. As to her illness, all nothing, of course. But it is an excellent thing to have Frank among us again, so near as town. They will stay a good while when they do come, and he will be half his time with us. This is precisely what I wanted. Well, pretty good news, is not it? Have you finished it? Has Emma read it all? Put it up, put it up; we will have a good talk about it some other time, but it will not do now. I shall only just mention the circumstance to the others in a common way."

Mrs. Weston was most comfortably pleased on the occasion. Her looks and words had nothing to restrain them. She was happy; she knew she was happy, and knew she ought to be happy. Her congratulations were warm and open; but Emma could not speak so fluently. She was a little occupied in weighing her own feelings, and trying to understand the degree of her agitation, which she rather thought was considerable.

Mr. Weston, however, too eager to be very observant, too communicative to want others to talk, was very well satisfied with what she did say, and soon moved away to make the rest of his friends happy by a partial communication of what the whole room must have overheard already.

It was well that he took everybody's joy for granted, or he might not have thought either Mr. Woodhouse or Mr. Knightley particularly

delighted. They were the first entitled, after Mrs. Weston and Emma, to be made happy. From them he would have proceeded to Miss Fairfax; but she was so deep in conversation with John Knightley that it would have been too positive an interruption; and finding himself close to Mrs. Elton, and her attention disengaged, he necessarily began on the subject with her.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I HOPE I shall soon have the pleasure of introducing my son to you," said Mr. Weston.

Mrs. Elton, very willing to suppose a particular compliment intended her by such a hope, smiled most graciously.

"You have heard of a certain Frank Churchill, I presume," he continued, "and know him to be my son, though he does not bear my name."

"Oh, yes, and I shall be very happy in his acquaintance. I am sure Mr. Elton will lose no time in calling on him; and we shall both have great pleasure in seeing him at the Vicarage."

"You are very obliging. Frank will be extremely happy, I am sure. He is to be in town next week, if not sooner. We have notice of it in a letter to-day. I met the letters in my way this morning, and seeing my son's hand, presumed to open it, though it was not directed to me — it was to Mrs. Weston. She is his principal correspondent, I assure you. I hardly ever get a letter."

"And so you absolutely opened what was directed to her! Oh, Mr. Weston," laughing affectedly, "I must protest against that. A most dangerous precedent indeed! I beg you will not let your neighbors follow your example. Upon my word, if this is what I am to expect, we mar-

ried women must begin to exert ourselves. Oh, Mr. Weston, I could not have believed it of you!"

"Ay, we men are sad fellows. You must take care of yourself, Mrs. Elton. This letter tells us — it is a short letter — written in a hurry, merely to give us notice: it tells us that they are all coming up to town directly on Mrs. Churchill's account: she has not been well the whole winter, and thinks Enscombe too cold for her; so they are all to move southward without loss of time."

"Indeed! from Yorkshire, I think. Enscombe is in Yorkshire?"

"Yes, they are about 190 miles from London: a considerable journey."

"Yes, upon my word, very considerable. Sixty-five miles farther than from Maple Grove to London. But what is distance, Mr. Weston, to people of large fortune? You would be amazed to hear how my brother, Mr. Suckling, sometimes flies about. You will hardly believe me, but twice in one week he and Mr. Bragge went to London and back again with four horses."

"The evil of the distance from Enscombe," said Mr. Weston, "is that Mrs. Churchill, as we understand, has not been able to leave the sofa for a week together. In Frank's last letter she complained, he said, of being too weak to get into her conservatory without having both his arm and his uncle's. This, you know, speaks a great degree of weakness; but now she is so impatient to be in town that she means to sleep only two nights on the road, — so Frank writes word. Certainly, deli-

cate ladies have very extraordinary constitutions, Mrs. Elton; you must grant me that."

"No, indeed, I shall grant you nothing. I always take the part of my own sex; I do indeed. I give you notice, you will find me a formidable antagonist on that point. I always stand up for women; and I assure you, if you knew how Selina feels with respect to sleeping at an inn you would not wonder at Mrs. Churchill's making incredible exertions to avoid it. Selina says it is quite horror to her; and I believe I have caught a little of her nicety. She always travels with her own sheets; an excellent precaution. Does Mrs. Churchill do the same?"

"Depend upon it, Mrs. Churchill does everything that any other fine lady ever did. Mrs. Churchill will not be second to any lady in the land for — "

Mrs. Elton eagerly interposed with, —

"Oh, Mr. Weston, do not mistake me. Selina is no fine lady, I assure you. Do not run away with such an idea."

"Is not she? Then she is no rule for Mrs. Churchill, who is as thorough a fine lady as anybody ever beheld."

Mrs. Elton began to think she had been wrong in disclaiming so warmly. It was by no means her object to have it believed that her sister was not a fine lady; perhaps there was want of spirit in the pretence of it; and she was considering in what way she had best retract, when Mr. Weston went on.

"Mrs. Churchill is not much in my good

graces, as you may suspect; but this is quite between ourselves. She is very fond of Frank, and therefore I would not speak ill of her. Besides, she is out of health now; but that indeed, by her own account, she has always been. I would not say so to everybody, Mrs. Elton; but I have not much faith in Mrs. Churchill's illness."

"If she is really ill, why not go to Bath, Mr. Weston? To Bath, or to Clifton?"

"She has taken it into her head that Enscombe is too cold for her. The fact is, I suppose, that she is tired of Enscombe. She has now been a longer time stationary there than she ever was before, and she begins to want change. It is a retired place, — a fine place, but very retired."

"Ay, — like Maple Grove, I dare say. Nothing can stand more retired from the road than Maple Grove. Such an immense plantation all round it! You seem shut out from everything, — in the most complete retirement. And Mrs. Churchill probably has not health or spirits like Selina to enjoy that sort of seclusion. Or, perhaps, she may not have resources enough in herself to be qualified for a country life. I always say a woman cannot have too many resources, — and I feel very thankful that I have so many myself as to be quite independent of society."

"Frank was here in February for a fortnight."

"So I remember to have heard. He will find an addition to the society of Highbury when he comes again; that is, if I may presume to call myself an addition. But perhaps he may never

have heard of there being such a creature in the world."

This was too loud a call for a compliment to be passed by; and Mr. Weston, with a very good grace, immediately exclaimed, —

"My dear madam! Nobody but yourself could imagine such a thing possible. Not heard of you! I believe Mrs. Weston's letters lately have been full of very little else than Mrs. Elton."

He had done his duty, and could return to his son.

"When Frank left us," continued he, "it was quite uncertain when we might see him again, which makes this day's news doubly welcome. It has been completely unexpected. That is, I always had a strong persuasion he would be here again soon; I was sure something favorable would turn up, — but nobody believed me. He and Mrs. Weston were both dreadfully desponding. 'How could he contrive to come? And how could it be supposed that his uncle and aunt would spare him again?' and so forth. I always felt that something would happen in our favor; and so it has, you see. I have observed, Mrs. Elton, in the course of my life, that if things are going untowardly one month, they are sure to mend the next."

"Very true, Mr. Weston, perfectly true. It is just what I used to say to a certain gentleman in company in the days of courtship, when, because things did not go quite right, — did not proceed with all the rapidity which suited his feelings, —

he was apt to be in despair, and exclaim that he was sure at this rate it would be May before Hymen's saffron robe would be put on for us! Oh! the pains I have been at to dispel those gloomy ideas, and give him cheerfuller views! The carriage — we had disappointments about the carriage — one morning, I remember, he came to me quite in despair."

She was stopped by a slight fit of coughing, and Mr. Weston instantly seized the opportunity of going on.

"You were mentioning May. May is the very month which Mrs. Churchill is ordered, or has ordered herself, to spend in some warmer place than Enscombe, — in short, to spend in London; so that we have the agreeable prospect of frequent visits from Frank the whole spring, — precisely the season of the year which one should have chosen for it: days almost at the longest; weather genial and pleasant, always inviting one out, and never too hot for exercise. When he was here before, we made the best of it; but there was a good deal of wet, damp, cheerless weather; there always is in February, you know; and we could not do half that we intended. Now will be the time. This will be complete enjoyment; and I do not know, Mrs. Elton, whether the uncertainty of our meetings, the sort of constant expectation there will be of his coming in to-day or to-morrow and at any hour, may not be more friendly to happiness than having him actually in the house. I think it is so. I think it is the state of mind which gives most spirit and delight.

I hope you will be pleased with my son; but you must not expect a prodigy. He is generally thought a fine young man, but do not expect a prodigy. Mrs. Weston's partiality for him is very great, and, as you may suppose, most gratifying to me. She thinks nobody equal to him."

"And I assure you, Mr. Weston, I have very little doubt that my opinion will be decidedly in his favor. I have heard so much in praise of Mr. Frank Churchill. At the same time it is fair to observe that I am one of those who always judge for themselves, and are by no means implicitly guided by others. I give you notice that as I find your son, so I shall judge of him. I am no flatterer."

Mr. Weston was musing.

"I hope," said he, presently, "I have not been severe upon poor Mrs. Churchill. If she is ill, I should be sorry to do her injustice; but there are some traits in her character which make it difficult for me to speak of her with the forbearance I could wish. You cannot be ignorant, Mrs. Elton, of my connection with the family, nor of the treatment I have met with; and, between ourselves, the whole blame of it is to be laid to her. She was the instigator. Frank's mother would never have been slighted as she was but for her. Mr. Churchill has pride; but his pride is nothing to his wife's: his is a quiet, indolent, gentlemanlike sort of pride, that would harm nobody and only make himself a little helpless and tiresome; but her pride is arrogance and insolence. And what inclines one less to bear, she has no fair pretence of family or blood.

She was nobody when he married her, barely the daughter of a gentleman; but ever since her being turned into a Churchill, she has out-Churchill'd them all in high and mighty claims: but in herself, I assure you, she is an upstart."

"Only think! well, that must be infinitely provoking! I have quite a horror of upstarts. Maple Grove has given me a thorough disgust to people of that sort; for there is a family in that neighborhood who are such an annoyance to my brother and sister from the airs they give themselves! Your description of Mrs. Churchill made me think of them directly. People of the name of Tupman, very lately settled there, and encumbered with many low connections, but giving themselves immense airs, and expecting to be on a footing with the old established families. A year and a half is the very utmost that they can have lived at West Hall; and how they got their fortune nobody knows. They came from Birmingham, which is not a place to promise much, you know, Mr. Weston. One has not great hopes from Birmingham. I always say there is something direful in the sound: but nothing more is positively known of the Tupmans, though a good many things, I assure you, are suspected; and yet by their manners they evidently think themselves equal even to my brother, Mr. Suckling, who happens to be one of their nearest neighbors. It is infinitely too bad. Mr. Suckling, who has been eleven years a resident at Maple Grove, and whose father had it before him — I believe, at least — I am almost sure that old Mr. Suckling had completed the purchase before his death."

They were interrupted. Tea was carrying round, and Mr. Weston, having said all that he wanted, soon took the opportunity of walking away.

After tea, Mr. and Mrs. Weston and Mr. Elton sat down with Mr. Woodhouse to cards. The remaining five were left to their own powers, and Emma doubted their getting on very well, — for Mr. Knightley seemed little disposed for conversation; Mrs. Elton was wanting notice, which nobody had inclination to pay; and she was herself in a worry of spirits which would have made her prefer being silent.

Mr. John Knightley proved more talkative than his brother. He was to leave them early the next day; and he soon began with —

"Well, Emma, I do not believe I have anything more to say about the boys; but you have your sister's letter, and everything is down at full length there, we may be sure. My charge would be much more concise than hers, and probably not much in the same spirit; all that I have to recommend being comprised in, — Do not spoil them, and do not physic them."

"I rather hope to satisfy you both," said Emma; "for I shall do all in my power to make them happy, which will be enough for Isabella; and happiness must preclude false indulgence and physic."

"And if you find them troublesome, you must send them home again."

"That is very likely. You think so, do not you?"

"I hope I am aware that they may be too noisy

for your father ; or even may be some incumbrance to you, if your visiting engagements continue to increase as much as they have done lately."

"Increase!"

"Certainly ; you must be sensible that the last half-year has made a great difference in your way of life."

"Difference! No, indeed, I am not."

"There can be no doubt of your being much more engaged with company than you used to be. Witness this very time. Here am I come down for only one day, and you are engaged with a dinner-party! When did it happen before? or anything like it? Your neighborhood is increasing, and you mix more with it. A little while ago, every letter to Isabella brought an account of fresh gayeties, — dinners at Mr. Cole's or balls at the Crown. The difference which Randalls, Randalls alone, makes in your goings-on is very great."

"Yes," said his brother, quickly ; "it is Randalls that does it all."

"Very well ; and as Randalls, I suppose, is not likely to have less influence than heretofore, it strikes me as a possible thing, Emma, that Henry and John may be sometimes in the way. And if they are, I only beg you to send them home."

"No," cried Mr. Knightley ; "that need not be the consequence. Let them be sent to Donwell. I shall certainly be at leisure."

"Upon my word," exclaimed Emma, "you amuse me! I should like to know how many of all my numerous engagements take place without your being of the party; and why I am to be supposed

in danger of wanting leisure to attend to the little boys. These amazing engagements of mine, — what have they been? Dining once with the Coles, and having a ball talked of, which never took place. I can understand you," nodding at Mr. John Knightley; "your good fortune in meeting with so many of your friends at once here delights you too much to pass unnoticed. — But you," turning to Mr. Knightley, "who know how very, very seldom I am ever two hours from Hartfield, — why you should foresee such a series of dissipation for me, I cannot imagine. And as to my dear little boys, I must say that if Aunt Emma has not time for them, I do not think they would fare much better with Uncle Knightley, who is absent from home about five hours where she is absent one; and who, when he is at home, is either reading to himself or settling his accounts."

Mr. Knightley seemed to be trying not to smile; and succeeded without difficulty, upon Mrs. Elton's beginning to talk to him.

CHAPTER IX.

A VERY little quiet reflection was enough to satisfy Emma as to the nature of her agitation on hearing this news of Frank Churchill. She was soon convinced that it was not for herself she was feeling at all apprehensive or embarrassed, — it was for him. Her own attachment had really subsided into a mere nothing, — it was not worth thinking of; but if he, who had undoubtedly been always so much the most in love of the two, were to be returning with the same warmth of sentiment which he had taken away, it would be very distressing. If a separation of two months should not have cooled him, there were dangers and evils before her: caution for him and for herself would be necessary. She did not mean to have her own affections entangled again, and it would be incumbent on her to avoid any encouragement of his.

She wished she might be able to keep him from an absolute declaration. That would be so very painful a conclusion of their present acquaintance; and yet, she could not help rather anticipating something decisive. She felt as if the spring would not pass without bringing a crisis, an event, a something to alter her present composed and tranquil state.

It was not very long, though rather longer than Mr. Weston had foreseen, before she had the power of forming some opinion of Frank Churchill's feelings. The Enscombe family were not in town quite so soon as had been imagined, but he was at Highbury very soon afterwards. He rode down for a couple of hours; he could not yet do more; but as he came from Randalls immediately to Hartfield, she could then exercise all her quick observation, and speedily determine how he was influenced, and how she must act. They met with the utmost friendliness. There could be no doubt of his great pleasure in seeing her. But she had an almost instant doubt of his caring for her as he had done, of his feeling the same tenderness in the same degree. She watched him well. It was a clear thing he was less in love than he had been. Absence, with the conviction probably of her indifference, had produced this very natural and very desirable effect.

He was in high spirits, as ready to talk and laugh as ever, and seemed delighted to speak of his former visit, and recur to old stories; and he was not without agitation. It was not in his calmness that she read his comparative indifference. He was not calm; his spirits were evidently fluttered; there was restlessness about him. Lively as he was, it seemed a liveliness that did not satisfy himself; but what decided her belief on the subject was his staying only a quarter of an hour, and hurrying away to make other calls in Highbury.

"He had seen a group of old acquaintance in the

street as he passed, —he had not stopped, he would not stop for more than a word, — but he had the vanity to think they would be disappointed if he did not call; and much as he wished to stay longer at Hartfield, he must hurry off."

She had no doubt as to his being less in love, but neither his agitated spirits nor his hurrying away seemed like a perfect cure; and she was rather inclined to think it implied a dread of her returning power, and a discreet resolution of not trusting himself with her long.

This was the only visit from Frank Churchill in the course of ten days. He was often hoping, intending to come; but was always prevented. His aunt could not bear to have him leave her. Such was his own account at Randalls. If he were quite sincere, if he really tried to come, it was to be inferred that Mrs. Churchill's removal to London had been of no service to the wilful or nervous part of her disorder. That she was really ill was very certain; he had declared himself convinced of it, at Randalls. Though much might be fancy, he could not doubt, when he looked back, that she was in a weaker state of health than she had been half a year ago. He did not believe it to proceed from anything that care and medicine might not remove, or at least that she might not have many years of existence before her; but he could not be prevailed on, by all his father's doubts, to say that her complaints were merely imaginary, or that she was as strong as ever.

It soon appeared that London was not the place for her. She could not endure its noise. Her

nerves were under continual irritation and suffering; and by the ten days' end, her nephew's letter to Randalls communicated a change of plan. They were going to remove immediately to Richmond. Mrs. Churchill had been recommended to the medical skill of an eminent person there, and had otherwise a fancy for the place. A ready-furnished house in a favorite spot was engaged, and much benefit expected from the change.

Emma heard that Frank wrote in the highest spirits of this arrangement, and seemed most fully to appreciate the blessing of having two months before him of such near neighborhood to many dear friends; for the house was taken for May and June. She was told that now he wrote with the greatest confidence of being often with them, almost as often as he could even wish.

Emma saw how Mr. Weston understood these joyous prospects. He was considering her as the source of all the happiness they offered. She hoped it was not so. Two months must bring it to proof.

Mr. Weston's own happiness was indisputable. He was quite delighted. It was the very circumstance he could have wished for. Now it would be really having Frank in their neighborhood. What were nine miles to a young man? — An hour's ride. He would be always coming over. The difference in that respect of Richmond and London was enough to make the whole difference of seeing him always and seeing him never. Sixteen miles, nay, eighteen, — it must be full eigh teen to Manchester Street, — was a serious obstacle.

Were he ever able to get away, the day would be spent in coming and returning. There was no comfort in having him in London, — he might as well be at Enscombe; but Richmond was the very distance for easy intercourse. Better than nearer!

One good thing was immediately brought to a certainty by this removal, — the ball at the Crown. It had not been forgotten before; but it had been soon acknowledged vain to attempt to fix the day. Now, however, it was absolutely to be: every preparation was resumed; and very soon after the Churchills had removed to Richmond, a few lines from Frank, to say that his aunt felt already much better for the change, and that he had no doubt of being able to join them for twenty-four hours at any given time induced them to name as early a day as possible.

Mr. Weston's ball was to be a real thing. A very few to-morrows stood between the young people of Highbury and happiness.

Mr. Woodhouse was resigned. The time of year lightened the evil to him. May was better for everything than February. Mrs. Bates was engaged to spend the evening at Hartfield; James had due notice, and he sanguinely hoped that neither dear little Henry nor dear little John would have anything the matter with them while dear Emma were gone.

CHAPTER X.

No misfortune occurred, again to prevent the ball. The day approached, the day arrived; and after a morning of some anxious watching Frank Churchill, in all the certainty of his own self, reached Randalls before dinner, and everything was safe.

No second meeting had there yet been between him and Emma. The room at the Crown was to witness it; but it would be better than a common meeting in a crowd. Mr. Weston had been so very earnest in his entreaties for her early attendance, for her arriving there as soon as possible after themselves, for the purpose of taking her opinion as to the propriety and comfort of the rooms before any other person came, that she could not refuse him, and must therefore spend some quiet interval in the young man's company. She was to convey Harriet, and they drove to the Crown in good time, the Randalls party just sufficiently before them.

Frank Churchill seemed to have been on the watch; and though he did not say much, his eyes declared that he meant to have a delightful evening. They all walked about together, to see that everything was as it should be; and within a few minutes were joined by the contents of another carriage, which Emma could not hear the sound of

at first, without great surprise. "So unreasonably early!" she was going to exclaim; but she presently found that it was a family of old friends, who were coming, like herself, by particular desire, to help Mr. Weston's judgment; and they were so very closely followed by another carriage of cousins, who had been entreated to come early with the same distinguishing earnestness, on the same errand, that it seemed as if half the company might soon be collected together for the purpose of preparatory inspection.

Emma perceived that her taste was not the only taste on which Mr. Weston depended, and felt that to be the favorite and intimate of a man who had so many intimates and confidants was not the very first distinction in the scale of vanity. She liked his open manners, but a little less of openheartedness would have made him a higher character. General benevolence, but not general friendship, made a man what he ought to be. — She could fancy such a man.

The whole party walked about, and looked, and praised again; and then, having nothing else to do, formed a sort of half-circle round the fire, to observe in their various modes, till other subjects were started, that, though May, a fire in the evening was still very pleasant.

Emma found that it was not Mrs. Weston's fault that the number of privy counsellors was not yet larger. They had stopped at Mrs. Bates's door to offer the use of their carriage, but the aunt and niece were to be brought by the Eltons.

Frank was standing by her, but not steadily;

there was a restlessness which showed a mind not at ease. He was looking about, he was going to the door, he was watching for the sound of other carriages, — impatient to begin, or afraid of being always near her.

Mrs. Elton was spoken of. "I think she must be here soon," said he. "I have a great curiosity to see Mrs. Elton, I have heard so much of her. It cannot be long, I think, before she comes."

A carriage was heard. He was on the move immediately; but coming back, said, —

"I am forgetting that I am not acquainted with her. I have never seen either Mr. or Mrs. Elton. I have no business to put myself forward."

Mr. and Mrs. Elton appeared; and all the smiles and the proprieties passed.

"But Miss Bates and Miss Fairfax!" said Mr. Weston, looking about. "We thought you were to bring them."

The mistake had been slight. The carriage was sent for them now. Emma longed to know what Frank's first opinion of Mrs. Elton might be; how he was affected by the studied elegance of her dress, and her smiles of graciousness. He was immediately qualifying himself to form an opinion by giving her very proper attention, after the introduction had passed.

In a few minutes the carriage returned. Somebody talked of rain. "I will see that there are umbrellas, sir," said Frank to his father: "Miss Bates must not be forgotten;" and away he went. Mr. Weston was following; but Mrs. Elton detained him, to gratify him by her opinion of his

son; and so briskly did she begin that the young man himself, though by no means moving slowly, could hardly be out of hearing.

"A very fine young man, indeed, Mr. Weston. You know I candidly told you I should form my own opinion; and I am happy to say that I am extremely pleased with him. You may believe me. I never compliment. I think him a very handsome young man, and his manners are precisely what I like and approve, — so truly the gentleman, without the least conceit or puppyism. You must know I have a vast dislike to puppies, — quite a horror of them. They were never tolerated at Maple Grove. Neither Mr. Suckling nor me had ever any patience with them; and we used sometimes to say very cutting things. Selina, who is mild almost to a fault, bore with them much better."

While she talked of his son, Mr. Weston's attention was chained; but when she got to Maple Grove, he could recollect that there were ladies just arriving to be attended to, and with happy smiles must hurry away.

Mrs. Elton turned to Mrs. Weston. "I have no doubt of its being our carriage with Miss Bates and Jane. Our coachman and horses are so extremely expeditious! I believe we drive faster than anybody. What a pleasure it is to send one's carriage for a friend! I understand you were so kind as to offer, but another time it will be quite unnecessary. You may be very sure I shall always take care of them."

Miss Bates and Miss Fairfax, escorted by the

two gentlemen, walked into the room; and Mrs. Elton seemed to think it as much her duty as Mrs. Weston's to receive them. Her gestures and movements might be understood by any one who looked on like Emma; but her words, everybody's words, were soon lost under the incessant flow of Miss Bates, who came in talking, and had not finished her speech under many minutes after her being admitted into the circle at the fire. As the door opened she was heard, —

"So very obliging of you! — No rain at all. Nothing to signify. I do not care for myself. Quite thick shoes. And Jane declares — Well!" as soon as she was within the door, "well! This is brilliant indeed! This is admirable! Excellently contrived, upon my word. Nothing wanting. Could not have imagined it. So well lighted up! Jane, Jane, look! did you ever see anything — Oh! Mr. Weston, you must really have had Aladdin's lamp. Good Mrs. Stokes would not know her own room again. I saw her as I came in; she was standing in the entrance. 'Oh! Mrs. Stokes,' said I; but I had not time for more." She was now met by Mrs. Weston. "Very well, I thank you, ma'am. I hope you are quite well. Very happy to hear it. So afraid you might have a headache! seeing you pass by so often, and knowing how much trouble you must have. Delighted to hear it indeed. —Ah! dear Mrs. Elton, so obliged to you for the carriage; excellent time; Jane and I quite ready. Did not keep the horses a moment. Most comfortable carriage. — Oh! and I am sure our thanks are due to you, Mrs. Weston,

on that score. Mrs. Elton had most kindly sent Jane a note, or we should have been. But two such offers in one day! Never were such neighbors! I said to my mother, 'Upon my word, ma'am.' — Thank you, my mother is remarkably well. Gone to Mr. Woodhouse's. I made her take her shawl, — for the evenings are not warm, — her large, new shawl, Mrs. Dixon's wedding-present. So kind of her to think of my mother! Bought at Weymouth, you know; Mr. Dixon's choice. There were three others, Jane says, which they hesitated about some time. Colonel Campbell rather preferred an olive. — My dear Jane, are you sure you did not wet your feet? It was but a drop or two, but I am so afraid; but Mr. Frank Churchill was so extremely — and there was a mat to step upon. I shall never forget his extreme politeness. — Oh! Mr. Frank Churchill, I must tell you my mother's spectacles have never been in fault since; the rivet never came out again. My mother often talks of your good nature: does not she, Jane? Do not we often talk of Mr. Frank Churchill? — Ah! here 's Miss Woodhouse. Dear Miss Woodhouse, how do you do? Very well, I thank you, quite well. This is meeting quite in fairyland. Such a transformation! Must not compliment, I know," eying Emma most complacently, — "that would be rude; but upon my word, Miss Woodhouse, you do look — How do you like Jane's hair? You are a judge. She did it all herself. Quite wonderful how she does her hair! No hairdresser from London, I think, could — Ah! Dr. Hughes, I declare — and Mrs. Hughes. Must

go and speak to Dr. and Mrs. Hughes for a moment. How do you do? How do you do? Very well, I thank you. This is delightful, is not it? Where 's dear Mr. Richard? Oh! there he is. Don't disturb him. Much better employed talking to the young ladies. — How do you do, Mr. Richard? I saw you the other day as you rode through the town. — Mrs. Otway, I protest! and good Mr. Otway, and Miss Otway, and Miss Caroline. Such a host of friends! and Mr. George and Mr. Arthur! How do you do? How do you all do? Quite well, I am much obliged to you. Never better. Don't I hear another carriage? Who can this be? — very likely the worthy Coles. Upon my word, this is charming, to be standing about among such friends! And such a noble fire! I am quite roasted. No coffee, I thank you, for me; never take coffee. A little tea, if you please, sir, by-and-by, no hurry. Oh! here it comes. Everything so good!"

Frank Churchill returned to his station by Emma; and as soon as Miss Bates was quiet, she found herself necessarily overhearing the discourse of Mrs. Elton and Miss Fairfax, who were standing a little way behind her. He was thoughtful. Whether he were overhearing too, she could not determine. After a good many compliments to Jane on her dress and look, — compliments very quietly and properly taken, — Mrs. Elton was evidently wanting to be complimented herself; and it was, "How do you like my gown? How do you like my trimming? How has Wright done my hair?" with many other relative questions, all

answered with patient politeness. Mrs. Elton then said, —

"Nobody can think less of dress in general than I do: but upon such an occasion as this, when everybody's eyes are so much upon me, and in compliment to the Westons, who I have no doubt are giving this ball chiefly to do me honor, I would not wish to be inferior to others; and I see very few pearls in the room except mine. — So Frank Churchill is a capital dancer, I understand. We shall see if our styles suit. — A fine young man certainly is Frank Churchill. I like him very well."

At this moment Frank began talking so vigorously that Emma could not but imagine he had overheard his own praises, and did not want to hear more; and the voices of the ladies were drowned for a while, till another suspension brought Mrs. Elton's tones again distinctly forward. Mr. Elton had just joined them, and his wife was exclaiming, —

"Oh! you have found us out at last, have you, in our seclusion? I was this moment telling Jane I thought you would begin to be impatient for tidings of us."

"Jane!" repeated Frank Churchill, with a look of surprise and displeasure. "That is easy; but Miss Fairfax does not disapprove it, I suppose."

"How do you like Mrs. Elton?" said Emma, in a whisper.

"Not at all."

"You are ungrateful."

"Ungrateful! What do you mean?" Then changing from a frown to a smile, "No, do not

tell me, — I do not want to know what you mean. Where is my father? When are we to begin dancing?"

Emma could hardly understand him: he seemed in an odd humor. He walked off to find his father, but was quickly back again with both Mr. and Mrs. Weston. He had met with them in a little perplexity which must be laid before Emma. It had just occurred to Mrs. Weston that Mrs. Elton must be asked to begin the ball, — that she would expect it; which interfered with all their wishes of giving Emma that distinction. Emma heard the sad truth with fortitude.

"And what are we to do for a proper partner for her?" said Mr. Weston. "She will think Frank ought to ask her."

Frank turned instantly to Emma, to claim her former promise, and boasted himself an engaged man, which his father looked his most perfect approbation of; and it then appeared that Mrs. Weston was wanting him to dance with Mrs. Elton himself, and that their business was to help to persuade him into it, which was done pretty soon. Mr. Weston and Mrs. Elton led the way; Mr. Frank Churchill and Miss Woodhouse followed. Emma must submit to stand second to Mrs. Elton, though she had always considered the ball as peculiarly for her. It was almost enough to make her think of marrying.

Mrs. Elton had undoubtedly the advantage at this time in vanity completely gratified; for though she had intended to begin with Frank Churchill, she could not lose by the change. Mr. Weston

might be his son's superior. In spite of this little rub, however, Emma was smiling with enjoyment, delighted to see the respectable length of the set as it was forming, and to feel that she had so many hours of unusual festivity before her. She was more disturbed by Mr. Knightley's not dancing than by anything else. There he was, among the standers-by, where he ought not to be; he ought to be dancing, — not classing himself with the husbands and fathers and whist-players, who were pretending to feel an interest in the dance till their rubbers were made up, — so young as he looked! He could not have appeared to greater advantage perhaps anywhere than where he had placed himself. His tall, firm, upright figure, among the bulky forms and stooping shoulders of the elderly men, was such as Emma felt must draw everybody's eyes; and excepting her own partner, there was not one among the whole row of young men who could be compared with him. He moved a few steps nearer, and those few steps were enough to prove in how gentlemanlike a manner, with what natural grace, he must have danced, would he but take the trouble. Whenever she caught his eye, she forced him to smile; but in general he was looking grave. She wished he could love a ball-room better, and could like Frank Churchill better. He seemed often observing her. She must not flatter herself that he thought of her dancing; but if he were criticising her behavior, she did not feel afraid. There was nothing like flirtation between her and her partner. They seemed more like cheerful, easy friends, than lovers. That Frank

Churchill thought less of her than he had done, was indubitable.

The ball proceeded pleasantly. The anxious cares, the incessant attentions of Mrs. Weston, were not thrown away. Everybody seemed happy; and the praise of being a delightful ball, which is seldom bestowed till after a ball has ceased to be, was repeatedly given in the very beginning of the existence of this. Of very important, very recordable events, it was not more productive than such meetings usually are. There was one, however, which Emma thought something of. The two last dances before supper were begun, and Harriet had no partner, — the only young lady sitting down; and so equal had been hitherto the number of dancers, that how there could be any one disengaged was the wonder. But Emma's wonder lessened soon afterwards, on seeing Mr. Elton sauntering about. He would not ask Harriet to dance if it were possible to be avoided: she was sure he would not, and she was expecting him every moment to escape into the card-room.

Escape, however, was not his plan. He came to the part of the room where the sitters-by were collected, spoke to some, and walked about in front of them, as if to show his liberty, and his resolution of maintaining it. He did not omit being sometimes directly before Miss Smith, or speaking to those who were close to her. Emma saw it. She was not yet dancing; she was working her way up from the bottom, and had therefore leisure to look around, and by only turning her head a little she saw it all. When she was half-way up the set,

the whole group were exactly behind her, and she would no longer allow her eyes to watch; but Mr. Elton was so near that she heard every syllable of a dialogue which just then took place between him and Mrs. Weston; and she perceived that his wife, who was standing immediately above her, was not only listening also, but even encouraging him by significant glances. The kind-hearted, gentle Mrs. Weston had left her seat to join him and say, "Do not you dance, Mr. Elton?" to which his prompt reply was, "Most readily, Mrs. Weston, if you will dance with me."

"Me! — oh, no! I would get you a better partner than myself. I am no dancer."

"If Mrs. Gilbert wishes to dance," said he, "I shall have great pleasure, I am sure; for though beginning to feel myself rather an old married man, and that my dancing days are over, it would give me very great pleasure at any time to stand up with an old friend like Mrs. Gilbert."

"Mrs. Gilbert does not mean to dance, but there is a young lady disengaged whom I should be very glad to see dancing, — Miss Smith."

"Miss Smith — oh! I had not observed. You are extremely obliging; and if I were not an old married man — But my dancing days are over, Mrs. Weston. You will excuse me. Anything else I should be most happy to do, at your command; but my dancing days are over."

Mrs. Weston said no more; and Emma could imagine with what surprise and mortification she must be returning to her seat. This was Mr. Elton! — the amiable, obliging, gentle Mr. Elton.

She looked round for a moment; he had joined Mr. Knightley at a little distance, and was arranging himself for settled conversation, while smiles of high glee passed between him and his wife.

She would not look again. Her heart was in a glow, and she feared her face might be as hot.

In another moment a happier sight caught her, — Mr. Knightley leading Harriet to the set! Never had she been more surprised, seldom more delighted, than at that instant. She was all pleasure and gratitude, both for Harriet and herself, and longed to be thanking him; and though too distant for speech, her countenance said much, as soon as she could catch his eye again.

His dancing proved to be just what she had believed it, extremely good; and Harriet would have seemed almost too lucky if it had not been for the cruel state of things before, and for the very complete enjoyment and very high sense of the distinction which her happy features announced. It was not thrown away on her; she bounded higher than ever, flew farther down the middle, and was in a continual course of smiles.

Mr. Elton had retreated into the card-room, looking (Emma trusted) very foolish. She did not think he was quite so hardened as his wife, though growing very like her: she spoke some of her feelings by observing audibly to her partner, —

"Knightley has taken pity on poor little Miss Smith! Very good-natured, I declare!"

Supper was announced. The move began; and

Miss Bates might be heard from that moment without interruption, till her being seated at table and taking up her spoon.

"Jane, Jane, my dear Jane, where are you? Here is your tippet. Mrs. Weston begs you to put on your tippet. She says she is afraid there will be draughts in the passage, though everything has been done — one door nailed up — quantities of matting — my dear Jane, indeed you must. Mr. Churchill, oh! you are too obliging! — How well you put it on! — so gratified! Excellent dancing indeed! — Yes, my dear, I ran home as I said I should to help grandmamma to bed, and got back again, and nobody missed me. I set off without saying a word, just as I told you. Grandmamma was quite well; had a charming evening with Mr. Woodhouse, a vast deal of chat and backgammon. Tea was made downstairs, biscuits and baked apples and wine before she came away; amazing luck in some of her throws; and she inquired a great deal about you, how you were amused, and who were your partners. 'Oh!' said I, 'I shall not forestall Jane; I left her dancing with Mr. George Otway; she will love to tell you all about it herself to-morrow: her first partner was Mr. Elton; I do not know who will ask her next, perhaps Mr. William Cox.' My dear sir, you are too obliging. Is there nobody you would not rather? — I am not helpless. Sir, you are most kind. Upon my word, Jane on one arm, and me on the other! Stop, stop, let us stand a little back, Mrs. Elton is going; dear Mrs. Elton, how elegant she looks — beautiful

lace! — Now we all follow in her train. Quite the queen of the evening! — Well, here we are at the passage. Two steps, Jane, take care of the two steps. Oh! no, there is but one. Well, I was persuaded there were two. How very odd! I was convinced there were two, and there is but one. I never saw anything equal to the comfort and style — candles everywhere. I was telling you of your grandmamma, Jane, — there was a little disappointment. The baked apples and biscuits, excellent in their way, you know; but there was a delicate fricassee of sweetbread and some asparagus brought in at first; and good Mr. Woodhouse, not thinking the asparagus quite boiled enough, sent it all out again. Now there is nothing grandmamma loves better than sweetbread and asparagus, so she was rather disappointed; but we agreed we would not speak of it to anybody, for fear of its getting round to dear Miss Woodhouse, who would be so very much concerned! — Well, this is brilliant! I am all amazement! — could not have supposed anything! — such elegance and profusion! I have seen nothing like it since — Well, where shall we sit? Where shall we sit? Anywhere, so that Jane is not in a draught. Where I sit is of no consequence. Oh! do you recommend this side? Well, I am sure, Mr. Churchill — only it seems too good — but just as you please. What you direct in this house cannot be wrong. Dear Jane, how shall we ever recollect half the dishes for grandmamma. Soup too! Bless me! I should not be helped so soon, but it smells most excellent, and I cannot help beginning."

Emma had no opportunity of speaking to Mr. Knightley till after supper; but when they were all in the ball-room again, her eyes invited him irresistibly to come to her and be thanked. He was warm in his reprobation of Mr. Elton's conduct, — it had been unpardonable rudeness; and Mrs. Elton's looks also received the due share of censure.

"They aimed at wounding more than Harriet," said he. "Emma, why is it that they are your enemies?"

He looked with smiling penetration; and on receiving no answer, added: "She ought not to be angry with you, I suspect, whatever he may be. To that surmise you say nothing, of course; but confess, Emma, that you did want him to marry Harriet."

"I did," replied Emma; "and they cannot forgive me."

He shook his head; but there was a smile of indulgence with it, and he only said, —

"I shall not scold you. I leave you to your own reflections."

"Can you trust me with such flatterers? Does my vain spirit ever tell me I am wrong?"

"Not your vain spirit, but your serious spirit. If one leads you wrong, I am sure the other tells you of it."

"I do own myself to have been completely mistaken in Mr. Elton. There is a littleness about him which you discovered, and which I did not; and I was fully convinced of his being in love with Harriet. It was through a series of strange blunders!"

"And, in return for your acknowledging so much, I will do you the justice to say that you would have chosen for him better than he has chosen for himself. Harriet Smith has some first-rate qualities, which Mrs. Elton is totally without. An unpretending, single-minded, artless girl — infinitely to be preferred by any man of sense and taste to such a woman as Mrs. Elton. I found Harriet more conversable than I expected."

Emma was extremely gratified. They were interrupted by the bustle of Mr. Weston calling on everybody to begin dancing again.

"Come, Miss Woodhouse, Miss Otway, Miss Fairfax, what are you all doing? Come, Emma, set your companions the example. Everybody is lazy! Everybody is asleep!"

"I am ready," said Emma, "whenever I am wanted."

"Whom are you going to dance with?" asked Mr. Knightley.

She hesitated a moment, and then replied, "With you, if you will ask me."

"Will you?" said he, offering his hand.

"Indeed I will. You have shown that you can dance, and you know we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it at all improper."

"Brother and sister! — no, indeed."

CHAPTER XI.

This little explanation with Mr. Knightley gave Emma considerable pleasure. It was one of the agreeable recollections of the ball, which she walked about the lawn the next morning to enjoy. She was extremely glad that they had come to so good an understanding respecting the Eltons, and that their opinions of both husband and wife were so much alike; and his praise of Harriet, his concession in her favor was peculiarly gratifying. The impertinence of the Eltons, which for a few minutes had threatened to ruin the rest of her evening, had been the occasion of some of its highest satisfactions; and she looked forward to another happy result, — the cure of Harriet's infatuation. From Harriet's manner of speaking of the circumstance before they quitted the ball-room, she had strong hopes. It seemed as if her eyes were suddenly opened, and she were enabled to see that Mr. Elton was not the superior creature she had believed him. The fever was over, and Emma could harbor little fear of the pulse being quickened again by injurious courtesy. She depended on the evil feelings of the Eltons for supplying all the discipline of pointed neglect that could be further requisite. Harriet rational, Frank Churchill not too much in love, and Mr. Knightley not

wanting to quarrel with her; how very happy a summer must be before her!

She was not to see Frank Churchill this morning. He had told her that he could not allow himself the pleasure of stopping at Hartfield as he was to be at home by the middle of the day. She did not regret it.

Having arranged all these matters, looked them through, and put them all to rights, she was just turning to the house, with spirits freshened up for the demands of the two little boys, as well as of their grandpapa, when the great iron sweep-gate opened, and two persons entered whom she had never less expected to see together, — Frank Churchill with Harriet leaning on his arm, — actually Harriet! A moment sufficed to convince her that something extraordinary had happened. Harriet looked white and frightened, and he was trying to cheer her. The iron gates and the front door were not twenty yards asunder: they were all three soon in the hall; and Harriet, immediately sinking into a chair, fainted away.

A young lady who faints must be recovered; questions must be answered, and surprises be explained. Such events are very interesting; but the suspense of them cannot last long. A few minutes made Emma acquainted with the whole.

Miss Smith and Miss Bickerton, another parlor boarder at Mrs. Goddard's, who had been also at the ball, had walked out together, and taken a road, — the Richmond road, which, though apparently public enough for safety, had led them into alarm. About half a mile beyond Highbury,

making a sudden turn, and deeply shaded by elms on each side, it became for a considerable stretch very retired; and when the young ladies had advanced some way into it, they had suddenly perceived, at a small distance before them, on a broader patch of greensward by the side, a party of gypsies. A child on the watch came towards them to beg; and Miss Bickerton, excessively frightened, gave a great scream, and calling on Harriet to follow her, ran up a steep bank, cleared a slight hedge at the top, and made the best of her way by a short cut back to Highbury. But poor Harriet could not follow. She had suffered very much from cramp after dancing, and her first attempt to mount the bank brought on such a return of it as made her absolutely powerless; and in this state, and exceedingly terrified, she had been obliged to remain.

How the trampers might have behaved, had the young ladies been more courageous, must be doubtful; but such an invitation for attack could not be resisted; and Harriet was soon assailed by half a-dozen children, headed by a stout woman and a great boy, all clamorous, and impertinent in look, though not absolutely in word. More and more frightened, she immediately promised them money, and taking out her purse, gave them a shilling, and begged them not to want more, or to use her ill. She was then able to walk, though but slowly, and was moving away: but her terror and her purse were too tempting; and she was followed, or rather surrounded, by the whole gang, demanding more.

In this state Frank Churchill had found her, — she trembling and conditioning, they loud and insolent. By a most fortunate chance, his leaving Highbury had been delayed so as to bring him to her assistance at this critical moment. The pleasantness of the morning had induced him to walk forward, and leave his horses to meet him by another road, a mile or two beyond Highbury; and happening to have borrowed a pair of scissors the night before of Miss Bates, and to have forgotten to restore them, he had been obliged to stop at her door, and go in for a few minutes: he was therefore later than he had intended; and being on foot, was unseen by the whole party till almost close to them. The terror which the woman and boy had been creating in Harriet was then their own portion. He had left them completely frightened; and Harriet eagerly clinging to him, and hardly able to speak, had just strength enough to reach Hartfield, before her spirits were quite overcome. It was his idea to bring her to Hartfield; he had thought of no other place.

This was the amount of the whole story, — of his communication and of Harriet's, as soon as she had recovered her senses and speech. He dared not stay longer than to see her well; these several delays left him not another minute to lose; and Emma engaging to give assurance of her safety to Mrs. Goddard, and notice of there being such a set of people in the neighborhood to Mr. Knightley, he set off, with all the grateful blessings that she could utter for her friend and herself.

Such an adventure as this — a fine young man and a lovely young woman thrown together in such a way — could hardly fail of suggesting certain ideas to the coldest heart and the steadiest brain. So Emma thought, at least. Could a linguist, could a grammarian, could even a mathematician have seen what she did, have witnessed their appearance together, and heard their history of it, without feeling that circumstances had been at work to make them peculiarly interesting to each other? How much more must an imaginist, like herself, be on fire with speculation and foresight! — especially with such a groundwork of anticipation as her mind had already made.

It was a very extraordinary thing! Nothing of the sort had ever occurred before to any young ladies in the place, within her memory, — no rencontre, no alarm of the kind; and now it had happened to the very person and at the very hour when the other very person was chancing to pass by to rescue her! It certainly was very extraordinary! And knowing, as she did, the favorable state of mind of each at this period, it struck her the more. He was wishing to get the better of his attachment to herself, she just recovering from her mania for Mr. Elton. It seemed as if everything united to promise the most interesting consequences. It was not possible that the occurrence should not be strongly recommending each to the other.

In the few minutes' conversation which she had yet had with him, while Harriet had been par-

tially insensible, he had spoken of her terror, her *naïveté*, her fervor as she seized and clung to his arm, with a sensibility amused and delighted; and just at last, after Harriet's own account had been given, he had expressed his indignation at the abominable folly of Miss Bickerton in the warmest terms. Everything was to take its natural course, however, neither impelled nor assisted. She would not stir a step, nor drop a hint. No, she had had enough of interference. There could be no harm in a scheme, a mere passive scheme. It was no more than a wish. Beyond it she would on no account proceed.

Emma's first resolution was to keep her father from the knowledge of what had passed, aware of the anxiety and alarm it would occasion; but she soon felt that concealment must be impossible. Within half an hour it was known all over Highbury. It was the very event to engage those who talk most, the young and the low; and all the youth and servants in the place were soon in the happiness of frightful news. The last night's ball seemed lost in the gypsies. Poor Mr. Woodhouse trembled as he sat, and, as Emma had foreseen, would scarcely be satisfied without their promising never to go beyond the shrubbery again. It was some comfort to him that many inquiries after himself and Miss Woodhouse (for his neighbors knew that he loved to be inquired after), as well as Miss Smith, were coming in during the rest of the day; and he had the pleasure of returning for answer, that they were all very indifferent;

which, though not exactly true, — for she was perfectly well, and Harriet not much otherwise, — Emma would not interfere with. She had an unhappy state of health in general for the child of such a man, for she hardly knew what indisposition was; and if he did not invent illnesses for her, she could make no figure in a message.

The gypsies did not wait for the operations of justice; they took themselves off in a hurry. The young ladies of Highbury might have walked again in safety before their panic began, and the whole history dwindled soon into a matter of little importance but to Emma and her nephews: in her imagination it maintained its ground; and Henry and John were still asking every day for the story of Harriet and the gypsies, and still tenaciously setting her right if she varied in the slightest particular from the original recital.

CHAPTER XII.

A VERY few days had passed after this adventure, when Harriet came one morning to Emma with a small parcel in her hand, and after sitting down and hesitating, thus began: —

"Miss Woodhouse — if you are at leisure, I have something that I should like to tell you, a sort of confession to make — and then, you know, it will be over."

Emma was a good deal surprised, but begged her to speak. There was a seriousness in Harriet's manner which prepared her, quite as much as her words, for something more than ordinary.

"It is my duty, and I am sure it is my wish," she continued, "to have no reserves with you on this subject. As I am, happily, quite an altered creature in one respect, it is very fit that you should have the satisfaction of knowing it. I do not want to say more than is necessary: I am too much ashamed of having given way as I have done, and I dare say you understand me."

"Yes," said Emma, "I hope I do."

"How I could so long a time be fancying myself — " cried Harriet, warmly. "It seems like madness! I can see nothing at all extraordinary in him now. I do not care whether I meet him or not, except that of the two I had rather not see

him and, indeed, I would go any distance round to avoid him. But I do not envy his wife in the least: I neither admire her nor envy her, as I have done. She is very charming, I dare say, and all that; but I think her very ill-tempered and disagreeable: I shall never forget her look the other night. However, I assure you, Miss Woodhouse, I wish her no evil. No, let them be ever so happy together, it will not give me another moment's pang; and to convince you that I have been speaking truth, I am now going to destroy what I ought to have destroyed long ago, what I ought never to have kept, — I know that very well," blushing as she spoke. "However, now I will destroy it all; and it is my particular wish to do it in your presence, that you may see how rational I am grown. Cannot you guess what this parcel holds?" said she, with a conscious look.

"Not the least in the world. Did he ever give you anything?"

"No, — I cannot call them gifts; but they are things that I have valued very much."

She held the parcel towards her, and Emma read the words "Most precious treasures" on the top. Her curiosity was greatly excited. Harriet unfolded the parcel, and she looked on with impatience. Within abundance of silver paper was a pretty little Tunbridge-ware box, which Harriet opened: it was well lined with the softest cotton; but, excepting the cotton, Emma saw only a small piece of court-plaister.

"Now," said Harriet, "you must recollect."

"No, indeed, I do not."

"Dear me! I should not have thought it possible you could forget what passed in this very room about court-plaister, one of the very last times we ever met in it. It was but a very few days before I had my sore throat, — just before Mr. and Mrs. John Knightley came; I think the very evening. Do not you remember his cutting his finger with your new pen-knife, and your recommending court-plaister? But as you had none about you, and knew I had, you desired me to supply him; and so I took mine out, and cut him a piece; but it was a great deal too large, and he cut it smaller, and kept playing some time with what was left before he gave it back to me. And so then, in my nonsense, I could not help making a treasure of it; so I put it by, never to be used, and looked at it now and then as a great treat."

"My dearest Harriet!" cried Emma, putting her hand before her face, and jumping up, "you make me more ashamed of myself than I can bear. Remember it? Ay, I remember it all now, — all, except your saving this relic: I knew nothing of that till this moment; but the cutting the finger, and my recommending court-plaister, and saying I had none about me — oh! my sins, my sins! — and I had plenty all the while in my pocket! One of my senseless tricks. I deserve to be under a continual blush all the rest of my life. Well," sitting down again, "go on; what else?"

"And had you really some at hand yourself? I am sure I never suspected it, you did it so naturally."

"And so you actually put this piece of court-

plaister by for his sake," said Emma, recovering from her state of shame and feeling, divided between wonder and amusement; and secretly she added to herself: "Lord bless me! when should I ever have thought of putting by in cotton a piece of court-plaister that Frank Churchill had been pulling about! I never was equal to this."

"Here," resumed Harriet, turning to her box again, "here is something still more valuable, — I mean that has been more valuable, — because this is what did really once belong to him, which the court-plaister never did."

Emma was quite eager to see this superior treasure. It was the end of an old pencil, the part without any lead.

"This was really his," said Harriet. "Do not you remember one morning? — no, I dare say you do not. But one morning — I forget exactly the day — but perhaps it was the Tuesday or Wednesday before that evening, he wanted to make a memorandum in his pocket-book; it was about spruce beer. Mr. Knightley had been telling him something about brewing spruce beer, and he wanted to put it down; but when he took out his pencil, there was so little lead that he soon cut it all away, and it would not do, so you lent him another, and this was left upon the table as good for nothing. But I kept my eye on it; and as soon as I dared, caught it up, and never parted with it again from that moment."

"I do remember it," cried Emma; "I perfectly remember it. Talking about spruce beer, — oh, yes! Mr. Knightley and I both saying we liked

it, and Mr. Elton's seeming resolved to learn to like it too. I perfectly remember it. — Stop! Mr. Knightley was standing just here, was not he? I have an idea he was standing just here."

"Ah! I do not know. I cannot recollect. It is very odd, but I cannot recollect. Mr. Elton was sitting here, I remember, much about where I am now."

"Well, go on."

"Oh! that's all. I have nothing more to show you, or to say, except that I am now going to throw them both behind the fire, and I wish you to see me do it."

"My poor dear Harriet! and have you actually found happiness in treasuring up these things?"

"Yes, simpleton as I was! — but I am quite ashamed of it now, and wish I could forget as easily as I can burn them. It was very wrong of me, you know, to keep any remembrances after he was married. I knew it was, but had not resolution enough to part with them:"

"But, Harriet, is it necessary to burn the court-plaister? I have not a word to say for the bit of old pencil, but the court-plaister might be useful."

"I shall be happier to burn it," replied Harriet. "It has a disagreeable look to me. I must get rid of everything. There it goes, and there is an end, thank Heaven! of Mr. Elton."

"And when," thought Emma, "will there be a beginning of Mr. Churchill?"

She had soon afterwards reason to believe that the beginning was already made, and could not but hope that the gypsy, though she had told no for-

tune, might be proved to have made Harriet's. About a fortnight after the alarm they came to a sufficient explanation, and quite undesignedly. Emma was not thinking of it at the moment, which made the information she received more valuable. She merely said, in the course of some trivial chat, "Well, Harriet, whenever you marry, I would advise you to do so and so," and thought no more of it, till after a minute's silence she heard Harriet say in a very serious tone, "I shall never marry."

Emma then looked up, and immediately saw how it was; and after a moment's debate as to whether it should pass unnoticed or not, replied, —

"Never marry! — This is a new resolution."

"It is one that I never shall change, however."

After another short hesitation, "I hope it does not proceed from — I hope it is not in compliment to Mr. Elton?"

"Mr. Elton indeed!" cried Harriet, indignantly. "Oh, no!" — and Emma could just catch the words, "so superior to Mr. Elton."

She then took a longer time for consideration. Should she proceed no further; should she let it pass, and seem to suspect nothing? Perhaps Harriet might think her cold or angry if she did; or perhaps, if she were totally silent, it might only drive Harriet into asking her to hear too much; and against anything like such an unreserve as had been, such an open and frequent discussion of hopes and chances, she was perfectly resolved. She believed it would be wiser for her to say and know at once all that she meant to say and know. Plain dealing was always best. She had previously

determined how far she would proceed, on any application of the sort; and it would be safer for both to have the judicious law of her own brain laid down with speed. She was decided, and thus spoke, —

"Harriet, I will not affect to be in doubt of your meaning. Your resolution, or rather your expectation of never marrying, results from an idea that the person whom you might prefer would be too greatly your superior in situation to think of you. Is not it so?"

"Oh, Miss Woodhouse, believe me, I have not the presumption to suppose — indeed I am not so mad. But it is a pleasure to me to admire him at a distance, and to think of his infinite superiority to all the rest of the world, with the gratitude, wonder, and veneration which are so proper in me especially.

"I am not at all surprised at you, Harriet. The service he rendered you was enough to warm your heart."

"Service! oh, it was such an inexpressible obligation! The very recollection of it, and all that I felt at the time, when I saw him coming, — his noble look, and my wretchedness before. Such a change! In one moment such a change! From perfect misery to perfect happiness!"

"It is very natural. It is natural, and it is honorable, — yes, honorable, I think, to choose so well and so gratefully. But that it will be a fortunate preference is more than I can promise. I do not advise you to give way to it, Harriet. I do not by any means engage for its being returned.

Consider what you are about. Perhaps it will be wisest in you to check your feelings while you can; at any rate do not let them carry you far, unless you are persuaded of his liking you. Be observant of him. Let his behavior be the guide of your sensations. I give you this caution now, because I shall never speak to you again on the subject. I am determined against all interference. Henceforward I know nothing of the matter. Let no name ever pass our lips. We were very wrong before; we will be cautious now. He is your superior, no doubt, and there do seem objections and obstacles of a very serious nature; but yet, Harriet, more wonderful things have taken place, — there have been matches of greater disparity. But take care of yourself. I would not have you too sanguine; though, however it may end, be assured that your raising your thoughts to him is a mark of good taste which I shall always know how to value."

Harriet kissed her hand in silent and submissive gratitude. Emma was very decided in thinking such an attachment no bad thing for her friend. Its tendency would be to raise and refine her mind, and it must be saving her from the danger of degradation.

CHAPTER XIII.

In this state of schemes and hopes and connivance, June opened upon Hartfield. To Highbury, in general, it brought no material change. The Eltons were still talking of a visit from the Sucklings, and of the use to be made of their barouche-landau; and Jane Fairfax was still at her grandmother's; and as the return of the Campbells from Ireland was again delayed, and August, instead of midsummer, fixed for it, she was likely to remain there full two months longer, provided at least she were able to defeat Mrs. Elton's activity in her service, and save herself from being hurried into a delightful situation against her will.

Mr. Knightley, who, for some reason best known to himself, had certainly taken an early dislike to Frank Churchill, was only growing to dislike him more. He began to suspect him of some double dealing in his pursuit of Emma. That Emma was his object appeared indisputable. Everything declared it: his own attentions, his father's hints, his mother-in-law's guarded silence, it was all in unison; words, conduct, discretion, and indiscretion told the same story. But while so many were devoting him to Emma, and Emma herself making him over to Harriet, Mr. Knightley began to suspect him of some inclination to trifle

with Jane Fairfax. He could not understand it; but there were symptoms of intelligence between them, — he thought so, at least, — symptoms of admiration on his side, which, having once observed, he could not persuade himself to think entirely void of meaning, however he might wish to escape any of Emma's errors of imagination. She was not present when the suspicion first arose. He was dining with the Randalls family and Jane at the Eltons'; and he had seen a look, more than a single look, at Miss Fairfax, which from the admirer of Miss Woodhouse seemed somewhat out of place. When he was again in their company, he could not help remembering what he had seen; nor could he avoid observations which, unless it were like Cowper and his fire at twilight,

> Myself creating what I saw,

brought him yet stronger suspicion of there being a something of private liking, of private understanding even, between Frank Churchill and Jane.

He had walked up one day after dinner, as he very often did, to spend his evening at Hartfield. Emma and Harriet were going to walk; he joined them; and on returning, they fell in with a larger party, who, like themselves, judged it wisest to take their exercise early, as the weather threatened rain, — Mr. and Mrs. Weston and their son, Miss Bates and her niece, who had accidentally met. They all united; and on reaching Hartfield gates, Emma, who knew it was exactly the sort of visiting that would be welcome to her father, pressed

them all to go in and drink tea with him. The Randalls party agreed to it immediately; and after a pretty long speech from Miss Bates, which few persons listened to, she also found it possible to accept dear Miss Woodhouse's most obliging invitation.

As they were turning into the grounds, Mr. Perry passed by on horseback. The gentlemen spoke of his horse.

"By the by," said Frank Churchill to Mrs. Weston, presently, "what became of Mr. Perry's plan of setting up his carriage?"

Mrs. Weston looked surprised, and said, "I did not know that he ever had any such plan."

"Nay, I had it from you. You wrote me word of it three months ago."

"Me! impossible!"

"Indeed you did. I remember it perfectly. You mentioned it as what was certainly to be very soon. Mrs. Perry had told somebody, and was extremely happy about it. It was owing to her persuasion, as she thought his being out in bad weather did him a great deal of harm. You must remember it now?"

"Upon my word I never heard of it till this moment."

"Never! really never! — Bless me! how could it be? Then I must have dreamt it — but I was completely persuaded — Miss Smith, you walk as if you were tired. You will not be sorry to find yourself at home."

"What is this, — what is this," cried Mr. Weston, "about Perry and a carriage? Is Perry

going to set up his carriage, Frank? I am glad he can afford it. You had it from himself, had you?"

"No, sir," replied his son, laughing, "I seem to have had it from nobody. Very odd! I really was persuaded of Mrs. Weston's having mentioned it in one of her letters to Enscombe, many weeks ago, with all these particulars; but as she declares she never heard a syllable of it before, of course it must have been a dream. I am a great dreamer. I dream of everybody at Highbury when I am away; and when I have gone through my particular friends, then I begin dreaming of Mr. and Mrs. Perry."

"It is odd, though," observed his father, "that you should have had such a regular connected dream about people whom it was not very likely you should be thinking of at Enscombe. Perry's setting up his carriage! and his wife's persuading him to it, out of care for his health, — just what will happen, I have no doubt, some time or other; only a little premature. What an air of probability sometimes runs through a dream; and at others, what a heap of absurdities it is! Well, Frank, your dream certainly shows that Highbury is in your thoughts when you are absent. Emma, you are a great dreamer, I think?"

Emma was out of hearing. She had hurried on before her guests to prepare her father for their appearance, and was beyond the reach of Mr. Weston's hint.

"Why, to own the truth," cried Miss Bates, who had been trying in vain to be heard the last

two minutes, "if I must speak on this subject, there is no denying that Mr. Frank Churchill might have — I do not mean to say that he did not dream it — I am sure I have sometimes the oddest dreams in the world — but if I am questioned about it, I must acknowledge that there was such an idea last spring: for Mrs. Perry herself mentioned it to my mother, and the Coles knew of it as well as ourselves — but it was quite a secret, known to nobody else, and only thought of about three days. Mrs. Perry was very anxious that he should have a carriage, and came to my mother in great spirits one morning because she thought she had prevailed. Jane, don't you remember grandmamma's telling us of it when we got home? I forget where we had been walking to — very likely to Randalls; yes, I think it was to Randalls. Mrs. Perry was always particularly fond of my mother — indeed I do not know who is not — and she had mentioned it to her in confidence; she had no objection to her telling us, of course, but it was not to go beyond; and from that day to this, I never mentioned it to a soul that I know of. At the same time I will not positively answer for my having never dropped a hint, because I know I do sometimes pop out a thing before I am aware. I am a talker, you know; I am rather a talker; and now and then I have let a thing escape me which I should not. I am not like Jane; I wish I were. I will answer for it she never betrayed the least thing in the world. Where is she? Oh! just behind. Perfectly remember Mrs. Perry's coming Extraordinary dream indeed!"

They were entering the hall. Mr. Knightley's eyes had preceded Miss Bates's in a glance at Jane. From Frank Churchill's face, where he thought he saw confusion suppressed or laughed away, he had involuntarily turned to hers; but she was indeed behind, and too busy with her shawl. Mr. Weston had walked in. The two other gentlemen waited at the door to let her pass. Mr. Knightley suspected in Frank Churchill the determination of catching her eye — he seemed watching her intently — in vain, however, if it were so. Jane passed between them into the hall, and looked at neither.

There was no time for further remark or explanation. The dream must be borne with, and Mr. Knightley must take his seat with the rest round the large modern circular table which Emma had introduced at Hartfield, and which none but Emma could have had power to place there and persuade her father to use, instead of the small-sized Pembroke on which two of his daily meals had for forty years been crowded. Tea passed pleasantly, and nobody seemed in a hurry to move.

"Miss Woodhouse," said Frank Churchill, after examining a table behind him, which he could reach as he sat, "have your nephews taken away their alphabets, their box of letters? It used to stand here. Where is it? This is a sort of dull-looking evening, that ought to be treated rather as winter than summer. We had great amusement with those letters one morning. I want to puzzle you again."

Emma was pleased with the thought; and pro-

ducing the box, the table was quickly scattered over with alphabets, which no one seemed so much disposed to employ as their two selves. They were rapidly forming words for each other, or for anybody else who would be puzzled. The quietness of the game made it particularly eligible for Mr. Woodhouse, who had often been distressed by the more animated sort which Mr. Weston had occasionally introduced, and who now sat happily occupied in lamenting, with tender melancholy, over the departure of the "poor little boys," or in fondly pointing out, as he took up any stray letter near him, how beautifully Emma had written it.

Frank Churchill placed a word before Miss Fairfax. She gave a slight glance round the table, and applied herself to it. Frank was next to Emma, Jane opposite to them, and Mr. Knightley so placed as to see them all; and it was his object to see as much as he could, with as little apparent observation. The word was discovered, and with a faint smile pushed away. If meant to be immediately mixed with the others, and buried from sight, she should have looked on the table instead of looking just across, for it was not mixed; and Harriet, eager after every fresh word, and finding out none, directly took it up, and fell to work. She was sitting by Mr. Knightley, and turned to him for help. The word was *blunder;* and as Harriet exultingly proclaimed it, there was a blush on Jane's cheek which gave it a meaning not otherwise ostensible. Mr. Knightley connected it with the dream; but how it could all be, was be-

yond his comprehension. How the delicacy, the discretion of his favorite could have been so lain asleep! He feared there must be some decided involvement. Disingenuousness and double dealing seemed to meet him at every turn. These letters were but the vehicle for gallantry and trick. It was a child's play, chosen to conceal a deeper game on Frank Churchill's part.

With great indignation did he continue to observe him; with great alarm and distrust to observe also his two blinded companions. He saw a short word prepared for Emma, and given to her with a look sly and demure. He saw that Emma had soon made it out, and found it highly entertaining, though it was something which she judged it proper to appear to censure; for she said, "Nonsense! for shame!" He heard Frank Churchill next say, with a glance towards Jane, "I will give it to her, — shall I?" and as clearly heard Emma opposing it with eager laughing warmth, — "No, no, you must not, you shall not, indeed."

It was done, however. This gallant young man, who seemed to love without feeling and to recommend himself without complaisance, directly handed over the word to Miss Fairfax, and with a particular degree of sedate civility entreated her to study it. Mr. Knightley's excessive curiosity to know what this word might be made him seize every possible moment for darting his eye towards it, and it was not long before he saw it to be *Dixon*. Jane Fairfax's perception seemed to accompany his; her comprehension was certainly more equal to the covert meaning, the superior intelligence, of those

five letters so arranged. She was evidently displeased; looked up, and seeing herself watched, blushed more deeply than he had ever perceived her, and saying only, "I did not know that proper names were allowed," pushed away the letters with even an angry spirit, and looked resolved to be engaged by no other word that could be offered. Her face was averted from those who had made the attack, and turned towards her aunt.

"Ay, very true, my dear," cried the latter, though Jane had not spoken a word: "I was just going to say the same thing. It is time for us to be going, indeed. The evening is closing in, and grandmamma will be looking for us. My dear sir, you are too obliging. We really must wish you good-night."

Jane's alertness in moving proved her as ready as her aunt had preconceived. She was immediately up, and wanting to quit the table; but so many were also moving that she could not get away; and Mr. Knightley thought he saw another collection of letters anxiously pushed towards her, and resolutely swept away by her unexamined. She was afterwards looking for her shawl, — Frank Churchill was looking also: it was growing dusk, and the room was in confusion; and how they parted, Mr. Knightley could not tell.

He remained at Hartfield after all the rest, his thoughts full of what he had seen; so full that when the candles came to assist his observations, he must — yes, he certainly must, as a friend, an anxious friend — give Emma some hint, ask her some question. He could not see her in a situation

of such danger without trying to preserve her. It was his duty.

"Pray, Emma," said he, "may I ask in what lay the great amusement, the poignant sting, of the last word given to you and Miss Fairfax? I saw the word, and am curious to know how it could be so very entertaining to the one, and so very distressing to the other."

Emma was extremely confused. She could not endure to give him the true explanation; for though her suspicions were by no means removed, she was really ashamed of having ever imparted them.

"Oh!" she cried, in evident embarrassment, "it all meant nothing: a mere joke among ourselves."

"The joke," he replied gravely, "seemed confined to you and Mr. Churchill."

He had hoped she would speak again, but she did not. She would rather busy herself about anything than speak. He sat a little while in doubt. A variety of evils crossed his mind. Interference, — fruitless interference. Emma's confusion and the acknowledged intimacy seemed to declare her affection engaged. Yet he would speak. He owed it to her to risk anything that might be involved in an unwelcome interference rather than her welfare, to encounter anything rather than the remembrance of neglect in such a cause.

"My dear Emma," said he at last, with earnest kindness, "do you think you perfectly understand the degree of acquaintance between the gentleman and lady we have been speaking of?"

"Between Mr. Frank Churchill and Miss Fairfax? Oh, yes, perfectly. Why do you make a doubt of it?"

"Have you never at any time had reason to think that he admired her, or that she admired him?"

"Never, never!" she cried with a most open eagerness. "Never, for the twentieth part of a moment, did such an idea occur to me. And how could it possibly come into your head?"

"I have lately imagined that I saw symptoms of attachment between them, certain expressive looks which I did not believe meant to be public."

"Oh! you amuse me excessively. I am delighted to find that you can vouchsafe to let your imagination wander; but it will not do, — very sorry to check you in your first essay, but indeed it will not do. There is no admiration between them, I do assure you; and the appearances which have caught you have arisen from some peculiar circumstances, feelings rather of a totally different nature, — it is impossible exactly to explain: there is a good deal of nonsense in it; but the part which is capable of being communicated, which is sense, is that they are as far from any attachment or admiration for one another as any two beings in the world can be. That is, I presume it to be so on her side, and I can answer for its being so on his. I will answer for the gentleman's indifference."

She spoke with a confidence which staggered, with a satisfaction which silenced Mr. Knightley. She was in gay spirits, and would have prolonged the conversation, wanting to hear the particulars

of his suspicions, every look described, and all the wheres and hows of a circumstance which highly entertained her; but his gayety did not meet hers. He found he could not be useful, and his feelings were too much irritated for talking. That he might not be irritated into an absolute fever by the fire which Mr. Woodhouse's tender habits required almost every evening throughout the year, he soon afterwards took a hasty leave, and walked home to the coolness and solitude of Donwell Abbey.

CHAPTER XIV.

After being long fed with hopes of a speedy visit from Mr. and Mrs. Suckling, the Highbury world were obliged to endure the mortification of hearing that they could not possibly come till the autumn. No such importation of novelties could enrich their intellectual stores at present. In the daily interchange of news they must be again restricted to the other topics, with which for a while the Sucklings' coming had been united, such as the last accounts of Mrs. Churchill, whose health seemed every day to supply a different report, and the situation of Mrs. Weston, whose happiness it was to be hoped might eventually be as much increased by the arrival of a child as that of all her neighbors was by the approach of it.

Mrs. Elton was very much disappointed. It was the delay of a great deal of pleasure and parade. Her introductions and recommendations must all wait, and every projected party be still only talked of. So she thought at first; but a little consideration convinced her that everything need not be put off. Why should not they explore to Box Hill though the Sucklings did not come? They could go there again with them in the autumn. It was settled that they should go to Box Hill. That there was to be such a party had been long generally known: it had even given the idea of another.

Emma had never been to Box Hill; she wished to see what everybody found so well worth seeing, and she and Mr. Weston had agreed to choose some fine morning and drive thither. Two or three more of the chosen only were to be admitted to join them, and it was to be done in a quiet, unpretending, elegant way, infinitely superior to the bustle and preparation, the regular eating and drinking, and picnic parade of the Eltons and the Sucklings.

This was so very well understood between them that Emma could not but feel some surprise and a little displeasure on hearing from Mr. Weston that he had been proposing to Mrs. Elton, as her brother and sister had failed her, that the two parties should unite and go together; and that as Mrs. Elton had very readily acceded to it, so it was to be, if she had no objection. Now, as her objection was nothing but her very great dislike of Mrs. Elton, of which Mr. Weston must already be perfectly aware, it was not worth bringing forward again: it could not be done without a reproof to him, which would be giving pain to his wife; and she found herself therefore obliged to consent to an arrangement which she would have done a great deal to avoid, — an arrangement which would probably expose her even to the degradation of being said to be of Mrs. Elton's party! Every feeling was offended; and the forbearance of her outward submission left a heavy arrear due of secret severity in her reflections on the unmanageable good-will of Mr. Weston's temper.

"I am glad you approve of what I have done,"

said he, very comfortably. "But I thought you would. Such schemes as these are nothing without numbers. One cannot have too large a party. A large party secures its own amusement. And she is a good-natured woman, after all. One could not leave her out."

Emma denied none of it aloud, and agreed to none of it in private.

It was now the middle of June, and the weather fine; and Mrs. Elton was growing impatient to name the day, and settle with Mr. Weston as to pigeon-pies and cold lamb, when a lame carriage-horse threw everything into sad uncertainty. It might be weeks, it might be only a few days, before the horse were usable; but no preparations could be ventured on, and it was all melancholy stagnation. Mrs. Elton's resources were inadequate to such an attack.

"Is not this most vexatious, Knightley?" she cried; "and such weather for exploring! These delays and disappointments are quite odious. What are we to do? The year will wear away at this rate, and nothing done. Before this time, last year, I assure you, we had a delightful exploring party from Maple Grove to Kings Weston."

"You had better explore to Donwell," replied Mr. Knightley. "That may be done without horses. Come and eat my strawberries: they are ripening fast."

If Mr. Knightley did not begin seriously, he was obliged to proceed so; for his proposal was caught at with delight; and the "Oh, I should like it of all things!" was not plainer in words

than manner. Donwell was famous for its strawberry-beds, which seemed a plea for the invitation: but no plea was necessary; cabbage-beds would have been enough to tempt the lady, who only wanted to be going somewhere. She promised him again and again to come — much oftener than he doubted — and was extremely gratified by such a proof of intimacy, such a distinguishing compliment as she chose to consider it.

"You may depend upon me," said she; "I certainly will come. — Name your day, and I will come. — You will allow me to bring Jane Fairfax?"

"I cannot name a day," said he, "till I have spoken to some others whom I would wish to meet you."

"Oh, leave all that to me; only give me a *carte-blanche*. I am Lady Patroness, you know. It is my party. I will bring friends with me."

"I hope you will bring Elton," said he; "but I will not trouble you to give any other invitations."

"Oh, now you are looking very sly; but consider, — you need not be afraid of delegating power to me. I am no young lady on her preferment. Married women, you know, may be safely authorized. It is my party. Leave it all to me. I will invite your guests."

"No," he calmly replied, "there is but one married woman in the world whom I can ever allow to invite what guests she pleases to Donwell; and that one is —"

"Mrs. Weston, I suppose," interrupted Mrs. Elton, rather mortified.

"No, — Mrs. Knightley; and till she is in being, I will manage such matters myself."

"Ah, you are an odd creature!" she cried, satisfied to have no one preferred to herself. "You are a humorist, and may say what you like, — quite a humorist. Well, I shall bring Jane with me, — Jane and her aunt. The rest I leave to you. I have no objections at all to meeting the Hartfield family. Don't scruple; I know you are attached to them."

"You certainly will meet them if I can prevail; and I shall call on Miss Bates in my way home."

"That is quite unnecessary, — I see Jane every day; but as you like. It is to be a morning scheme, you know, Knightley; quite a simple thing. I shall wear a large bonnet, and bring one of my little baskets hanging on my arm. Here, probably this basket with pink riband. Nothing can be more simple, you see. And Jane will have such another. There is to be no form or parade, — a sort of gypsy party. We are to walk about your gardens, and gather the strawberries ourselves, and sit under trees; and whatever else you may like to provide, it is to be all out of doors, — a table spread in the shade, you know. Everything as natural and simple as possible. Is not that your idea?"

"Not quite. My idea of the simple and the natural will be to have the table spread in the dining-room. The nature and the simplicity of gentlemen and ladies with their servants and furniture I think is best observed by meals within doors. When you are tired of eating strawberries

in the garden, there shall be cold meat in the house."

"Well, as you please, only don't have a great set-out. And, by the by, can I or my housekeeper be of any use to you with our opinion? Pray be sincere, Knightley. If you wish me to talk to Mrs. Hodges, or to inspect anything —"

"I have not the least wish for it, I thank you."

"Well, — but if any difficulties should arise, my housekeeper is extremely clever."

"I will answer for it that mine thinks herself full as clever, and would spurn anybody's assistance."

"I wish we had a donkey. The thing would be for us all to come on donkeys, — Jane, Miss Bates, and me, — and my *caro sposo* walking by. I really must talk to him about purchasing a donkey. In a country life I conceive it to be a sort of necessary; for let a woman have ever so many resources, it is not possible for her to be always shut up at home; and very long walks, you know — in summer there is dust, and in winter there is dirt."

"You will not find either between Donwell and Highbury. Donwell-lane is never dusty, and now it is perfectly dry. Come on a donkey, however, if you prefer it. You can borrow Mrs. Cole's. I would wish everything to be as much to your taste as possible."

"That I am sure you would. Indeed I do you justice, my good friend. Under that peculiar sort of dry, blunt manner I know you have the warmest heart. As I tell Mr. E., you are a thorough

humorist. Yes, believe me, Knightley, I am fully sensible of your attention to me in the whole of this scheme. You have hit upon the very thing to please me."

Mr. Knightley had another reason for avoiding a table in the shade. He wished to persuade Mr. Woodhouse as well as Emma to join the party; and he knew that to have any of them sitting down out of doors to eat would inevitably make him ill. Mr. Woodhouse must not, under the specious pretence of a morning drive, and an hour or two spent at Donwell, be tempted away to his misery.

He was invited on good faith. No lurking horrors were to upbraid him for his easy credulity. He did consent. He had not been at Donwell for two years. "Some very fine morning he, Emma, and Harriet could go very well; and he could sit still with Mrs. Weston while the dear girls walked about the gardens. He did not suppose they could be damp now in the middle of the day. He should like to see the old house again exceedingly, and should be very happy to meet Mr. and Mrs. Elton, and any other of his neighbors. He could not see any objection at all to his and Emma's and Harriet's going there some very fine morning. He thought it very well done of Mr. Knightley to invite them, very kind and sensible, — much cleverer than dining out. He was not fond of dining out."

Mr. Knightley was fortunate in everybody's most ready concurrence. The invitation was everywhere so well received that it seemed as if, like Mrs. Elton, they were all taking the scheme

as a particular compliment to themselves. Emma and Harriet professed very high expectations of pleasure from it; and Mr. Weston, unasked, promised to get Frank over to join them, if possible, — a proof of approbation and gratitude which could have been dispensed with. Mr. Knightley was then obliged to say that he should be glad to see him; and Mr. Weston engaged to lose no time in writing, and spare no arguments to induce him to come.

In the mean while the lame horse recovered so fast that the party to Box Hill was again under happy consideration; and at last Donwell was settled for one day, and Box Hill for the next, — the weather appearing exactly right.

Under a bright mid-day sun at almost midsummer, Mr. Woodhouse was safely conveyed in his carriage with one window down to partake of this *al fresco* party; and in one of the most comfortable rooms in the Abbey, especially prepared for him by a fire all the morning, he was happily placed, quite at his ease, ready to talk with pleasure of what had been achieved, and advise everybody to come and sit down and not to heat themselves. Mrs. Weston, who seemed to have walked there on purpose to be tired, and sit all the time with him, remained when all the others were invited or persuaded out, his patient listener and sympathizer.

It was so long since Emma had been at the Abbey that as soon as she was satisfied of her father's comfort she was glad to leave him, and look around her; eager to refresh and correct her memory with more particular observation, more

exact understanding of a house and grounds which must ever be so interesting to her and all her family.

She felt all the honest pride and complacency which her alliance with the present and future proprietor could fairly warrant, as she viewed the respectable size and style of the building; its suitable, becoming, characteristic situation, low and sheltered; its ample gardens stretching down to meadows washed by a stream of which the Abbey, with all the old neglect of prospect, had scarcely a sight; and its abundance of timber in rows and avenues which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up. The house was larger than Hartfield, and totally unlike it, covering a good deal of ground, rambling and irregular, with many comfortable and one or two handsome rooms. It was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was; and Emma felt an increasing respect for it as the residence of a family of such true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding. Some faults of temper John Knightley had; but Isabella had connected herself unexceptionably. She had given them neither men nor names nor places that could raise a blush. These were pleasant feelings, and she walked about and indulged them till it was necessary to do as the others did and collect round the strawberry-beds. The whole party were assembled excepting Frank Churchill, who was expected every moment from Richmond; and Mrs. Elton in all her apparatus of happiness, her large bonnet and her basket, was very ready to lead the way in gathering, accepting, or talking.

Strawberries, and only strawberries, could now be thought or spoken of. "The best fruit in England — everybody's favorite — always wholesome. These the finest beds and finest sorts. Delightful to gather for one's self — the only way of really enjoying them. Morning decidedly the best time — never tired — every sort good — hautboy infinitely superior — no comparison — the others hardly eatable — hautboys very scarce — Chili preferred — white wood finest flavor of all — price of strawberries in London — abundance about Bristol — Maple Grove — cultivation — beds when to be renewed — gardeners thinking exactly different — no general rule — gardeners never to be put out of their way — delicious fruit — only too rich to be eaten much of — inferior to cherries — currants more refreshing — only objection to gathering strawberries the stooping — glaring sun — tired to death — could bear it no longer — must go and sit in the shade."

Such, for half an hour, was the conversation; interrupted only once by Mrs. Weston, who came out in her solicitude after her son-in-law to inquire if he were come; and she was a little uneasy. She had some fears of his horse.

Seats tolerably in the shade were found; and now Emma was obliged to overhear what Mrs. Elton and Jane Fairfax were talking of. A situation, a most desirable situation, was in question. Mrs. Elton had received notice of it that morning, and was in raptures. It was not with Mrs. Suckling, it was not with Mrs. Bragge, but in felicity and splendor it fell short only of them: it was

with a cousin of Mrs. Bragge, an acquaintance of Mrs. Suckling, a lady known at Maple Grove. Delightful, charming, superior, first circles, spheres, lines, ranks, everything; and Mrs. Elton was wild to have the offer closed with immediately. On her side all was warmth, energy, and triumph; and she positively refused to take her friend's negative, though Miss Fairfax continued to assure her that she would not at present engage in anything, —repeating the same motives which she had been heard to urge before. Still Mrs. Elton insisted on being authorized to write an acquiescence by the morrow's post. How Jane could bear it at all was astonishing to Emma. She did look vexed: she did speak pointedly; and at last, with a decision of action unusual to her, proposed a removal. "Should not they walk? Would not Mr. Knightley show them the gardens, — all the gardens? She wished to see the whole extent." The pertinacity of her friend seemed more than she could bear.

It was hot; and after walking some time over the gardens in a scattered, dispersed way, scarcely any three together, they insensibly followed one another to the delicious shade of a broad, short avenue of limes, which, stretching beyond the garden at an equal distance from the river, seemed the finish of the pleasure grounds. It led to nothing, — nothing but a view at the end over a low stone-wall with high pillars, which seemed intended, in their erection, to give the appearance of an approach to the house, which never had been there. Disputable, however, as might be the

taste of such a termination, it was in itself a charming walk, and the view which closed it extremely pretty. The considerable slope, at nearly the foot of which the Abbey stood, gradually acquired a steeper form beyond its grounds; and at half a mile distant was a bank of considerable abruptness and grandeur, well clothed with wood; and at the bottom of this bank, favorably placed and sheltered, rose the Abbey-Mill Farm, with meadows in front, and the river making a close and handsome curve around it.

It was a sweet view, — sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright without being oppressive.

In this walk Emma and Mr. Weston found all the others assembled; and towards this view she immediately perceived Mr. Knightley and Harriet distinct from the rest, quietly leading the way. Mr. Knightley and Harriet! It was an odd *tête-à-tête;* but she was glad to see it. There had been a time when he would have scorned her as a companion, and turned from her with little ceremony. Now they seemed in pleasant conversation. There had been a time also when Emma would have been sorry to see Harriet in a spot so favorable for the Abbey-Mill Farm; but now she feared it not. It might be safely viewed with all its appendages of prosperity and beauty, its rich pastures, spreading flocks, orchard in blossom, and light column of smoke ascending. She joined them at the wall, and found them more engaged in talking than in looking around. He was giving Harriet informa-

tion as to modes of agriculture, etc.; and Emma received a smile which seemed to say, "These are my own concerns. I have a right to talk on such subjects, without being suspected of introducing Robert Martin." She did not suspect him. It was too old a story. Robert Martin had probably ceased to think of Harriet. They took a few turns together along the walk. The shade was most refreshing, and Emma found it the pleasantest part of the day.

The next remove was to the house; they must all go in and eat; and they were all seated and busy, and still Frank Churchill did not come. Mrs. Weston looked, and looked in vain. His father would not own himself uneasy, and laughed at her fears; but she could not be cured of wishing that he would part with his black mare. He had expressed himself as to coming, with more than common certainty.

"His aunt was so much better that he had not a doubt of getting over to them." Mrs. Churchill's state, however, as many were ready to remind her, was liable to such sudden variation as might disappoint her nephew in the most reasonable dependence; and Mrs. Weston was at last persuaded to believe, or to say, that it must be by some attack of Mrs. Churchill that he was prevented coming. Emma looked at Harriet while the point was under consideration; she behaved very well, and betrayed no emotion.

The cold repast was over, and the party were to go out once more to see what had not yet been seen, the old Abbey fish-ponds; perhaps get as far

as the clover, which was to be begun cutting on the morrow, or, at any rate, have the pleasure of being hot, and growing cool again. Mr. Woodhouse, who had already taken his little round in the highest part of the gardens, where no damps from the river were imagined even by him, stirred no more; and his daughter resolved to remain with him, that Mrs. Weston might be persuaded away by her husband to the exercise and variety which her spirits seemed to need.

Mr. Knightley had done all in his power for Mr. Woodhouse's entertainment. Books of engravings, drawers of medals, cameos, corals, shells, and every other family collection within his cabinets, had been prepared for his old friend, to while away the morning; and the kindness had perfectly answered. Mr. Woodhouse had been exceedingly well amused. Mrs. Weston had been showing them all to him, and now he would show them all to Emma; fortunate in having no other resemblance to a child, than in a total want of taste for what he saw, for he was slow, constant, and methodical. Before this second looking over was begun, however, Emma walked into the hall for the sake of a few moments' free observation of the entrance and ground-plot of the house, and was hardly there, when Jane Fairfax appeared, coming quickly in from the garden, and with a look of escape. Little expecting to meet Miss Woodhouse so soon, there was a start at first; but Miss Woodhouse was the very person she was in quest of.

"Will you be so kind," said she, "when I am

missed, as to say that I am gone home? I am going this moment. My aunt is not aware how late it is, nor how long we have been absent; but I am sure we shall be wanted, and I am determined to go directly. I have said nothing about it to anybody. It would only be giving trouble and distress. Some are gone to the ponds, and some to the lime walk. Till they all come in I shall not be missed; and when they do, will you have the goodness to say that I am gone?"

"Certainly, if you wish it; but you are not going to walk to Highbury alone?"

"Yes; what should hurt me? I walk fast. I shall be at home in twenty minutes."

"But it is too far, indeed it is, to be walking quite alone. Let my father's servant go with you. Let me order the carriage. It can be round in five minutes."

"Thank you, thank you; but on no account. I would rather walk. And for me to be afraid of walking alone, — I, who may so soon have to guard others!"

She spoke with great agitation; and Emma very feelingly replied: "That can be no reason for your being exposed to danger now. I must order the carriage. The heat even would be danger. You are fatigued already."

"I am," she answered, — "I am fatigued; but it is not the sort of fatigue — quick walking will refresh me. Miss Woodhouse, we all know at times what it is to be wearied in spirits. Mine, I confess, are exhausted. The greatest kindness you can show me will be to let me have my own

way, and only say that I am gone when it is necessary."

Emma had not another word to oppose. She saw it all; and entering into her feelings, promoted her quitting the house immediately, and watched her safely off with the zeal of a friend. Her parting look was grateful; and her parting words, "Oh, Miss Woodhouse, the comfort of being sometimes alone!" seemed to burst from an overcharged heart, and to describe somewhat of the continual endurance to be practised by her, even towards some of those who loved her best.

"Such a home, indeed! such an aunt!" said Emma, as she turned back into the hall again. "I do pity you. And the more sensibility you betray of their just horrors, the more I shall like you."

Jane had not been gone a quarter of an hour, and they had only accomplished some views of St. Mark's Place, Venice, when Frank Churchill entered the room. Emma had not been thinking of him, — she had forgotten to think of him; but she was very glad to see him. Mrs. Weston would be at ease. The black mare was blameless; they were right who had named Mrs. Churchill as the cause. He had been detained by a temporary increase of illness in her, — a nervous seizure, which had lasted some hours; and he had quite given up every thought of coming till very late; and had he known how hot a ride he should have, and how late, with all his hurry, he must be, he believed he should not have come at all. The heat was excessive; he had never suffered anything like it — almost wished he had stayed at home — nothing

killed him like heat — he could bear any degree of cold, etc., but heat was intolerable; and he sat down, at the greatest possible distance from the slight remains of Mr. Woodhouse's fire, looking very deplorable.

"You will soon be cooler, if you sit still," said Emma.

"As soon as I am cooler I shall go back again. I could very ill be spared; but such a point had been made of my coming! You will all be going soon, I suppose; the whole party breaking up. I met one as I came — Madness in such weather! — absolute madness!"

Emma listened, and looked, and soon perceived that Frank Churchill's state might be best defined by the expressive phrase of being out of humor. Some people were always cross when they were hot. Such might be his constitution; and as she knew that eating and drinking were often the cure of such incidental complaints, she recommended his taking some refreshment; he would find abundance of everything in the dining-room; and she humanely pointed out the door.

"No; he should not eat. He was not hungry; it would only make him hotter." In two minutes, however, he relented in his own favor; and muttering something about spruce beer, walked off. Emma returned all her attention to her father, saying in secret, —

"I am glad I have done being in love with him. I should not like a man who is so soon discomposed by a hot morning. Harriet's sweet, easy temper will not mind it."

He was gone long enough to have had a very comfortable meal, and came back all the better, — grown quite cool, and, with good manners, like himself, able to draw a chair close to them, take an interest in their employment, and regret in a reasonable way that he should be so late. He was not in his best spirits, but seemed trying to improve them; and at last made himself talk nonsense very agreeably. They were looking over views in Swisserland.

"As soon as my aunt gets well, I shall go abroad," said he. "I shall never be easy till I have seen some of these places. You will have my sketches, some time or other, to look at — or my tour to read — or my poem. I shall do something to expose myself."

"That may be, — but not by sketches in Swisserland. You will never go to Swisserland. Your uncle and aunt will never allow you to leave England."

"They may be induced to go too. A warm climate may be prescribed for her. I have more than half an expectation of our all going abroad. I assure you I have. I feel a strong persuasion, this morning, that I shall soon be abroad. I ought to travel. I am tired of doing nothing. I want a change. I am serious, Miss Woodhouse, whatever your penetrating eyes may fancy — I am sick of England — and would leave it to-morrow if I could."

"You are sick of prosperity and indulgence. Cannot you invent a few hardships for yourself, and be contented to stay?"

"I sick of prosperity and indulgence! You are quite mistaken. I do not look upon myself as either prosperous or indulged. I am thwarted in everything material. I do not consider myself at all a fortunate person."

"You are not quite so miserable, though, as when you first came. Go, and eat and drink a little more, and you will do very well. Another slice of cold meat, another draught of Madeira and water, will make you nearly on a par with the rest of us."

"No, — I shall not stir. I shall sit by you. You are my best cure."

"We are going to Box Hill to-morrow; you will join us. It is not Swisserland, but it will be something for a young man so much in want of a change. You will stay, and go with us?"

"No, certainly not; I shall go home in the cool of the evening."

"But you may come again in the cool of to-morrow morning."

"No — it will not be worth while. If I come, I shall be cross."

"Then pray stay at Richmond."

"But if I do, I shall be crosser still. I can never bear to think of you all there without me."

"These are difficulties which you must settle for yourself. Choose your own degree of crossness. I shall press you no more."

The rest of the party were now returning, and all were soon collected. With some there was great joy at the sight of Frank Churchill; others took it very composedly; but there was a very general dis-

tress and disturbance on Miss Fairfax's disappearance being explained. That it was time for everybody to go, concluded the subject; and with a short final arrangement for the next day's scheme, they parted. Frank Churchill's little inclination to exclude himself increased so much that his last words to Emma were, —

"Well, — if you wish me to stay and join the party, I will."

She smiled her acceptance; and nothing less than a summons from Richmond was to take him back before the following evening.

CHAPTER XV.

THEY had a very fine day for Box Hill; and all the other outward circumstances of arrangement, accommodation, and punctuality were in favor of a pleasant party. Mr. Weston directed the whole, officiating safely between Hartfield and the vicarage, and everybody was in good time. Emma and Harriet went together; Miss Bates and her niece, with the Eltons; the gentlemen on horseback. Mrs. Weston remained with Mr. Woodhouse. Nothing was wanting but to be happy when they got there. Seven miles were travelled in expectation of enjoyment, and everybody had a burst of admiration on first arriving; but in the general amount of the day there was deficiency. There was a languor, a want of spirits, a want of union, which could not be got over. They separated too much into parties. The Eltons walked together; Mr. Knightley took charge of Miss Bates and Jane; and Emma and Harriet belonged to Frank Churchill. And Mr. Weston tried in vain to make them harmonize better. It seemed at first an accidental division, but it never materially varied. Mr. and Mrs. Elton, indeed, showed no unwillingness to mix, and be as agreeable as they could; but during the two whole hours that were spent on the hill, there seemed a principle of separation between

the other parties, too strong for any fine prospects, or any cold collation, or any cheerful Mr. Weston to remove.

At first it was downright dulness to Emma. She had never seen Frank Churchill so silent and stupid. He said nothing worth hearing, looked without seeing, admired without intelligence, listened without knowing what she said. While he was so dull, it was no wonder that Harriet should be dull likewise, and they were both insufferable.

When they all sat down it was better, — to her taste a great deal better, — for Frank Churchill grew talkative and gay, making her his first subject. Every distinguishing attention that could be paid, was paid to her. To amuse her, and be agreeable in her eyes, seemed all that he cared for; and Emma, glad to be enlivened, not sorry to be flattered, was gay and easy too, and gave him all the friendly encouragement, the admission to be gallant, which she had ever given in the first and most animating period of their acquaintance, but which now, in her own estimation, meant nothing, though in the judgment of most people looking on, it must have had such an appearance as no English word but "flirtation" could very well describe. "Mr. Frank Churchill and Miss Woodhouse flirted together excessively." They were laying themselves open to that very phrase, and to having it sent off in a letter to Maple Grove by one lady, to Ireland by another. Not that Emma was gay and thoughtless from any real felicity; it was rather because she felt less happy than she had expected.

She laughed because she was disappointed; and though she liked him for his attentions, and thought them all, whether in friendship, admiration, or playfulness, extremely judicious, they were not winning back her heart. She still intended him for her friend.

"How much I am obliged to you," said he, "for telling me to come to-day! If it had not been for you, I should certainly have lost all the happiness of this party. I had quite determined to go away again."

"Yes, you were very cross; and I do not know what about, except that you were too late for the best strawberries. I was a kinder friend than you deserved. But you were humble. You begged hard to be commanded to come."

"Don't say I was cross. I was fatigued. The heat overcame me."

"It is hotter to-day."

"Not to my feelings. I am perfectly comfortable to-day."

"You are comfortable because you are under command."

"Your command? Yes."

"Perhaps I intended you to say so, but I meant self-command. You had, somehow or other, broken bounds yesterday, and run away from your own management; but to-day you are got back again — and as I cannot be always with you, it is best to believe your temper under your own command rather than mine."

"It comes to the same thing. I can have no self-command without a motive. You order me,

whether you speak or not. And you can be always with me. You are always with me."

"Dating from three o'clock yesterday. My perpetual influence could not begin earlier, or you would not have been so much out of humor before."

"Three o'clock yesterday! That is your date. I thought I had seen you first in February."

"Your gallantry is really unanswerable. But," lowering her voice, "nobody speaks except ourselves, and it is rather too much to be talking nonsense for the entertainment of seven silent people."

"I say nothing of which I am ashamed," replied he, with lively impudence. "I saw you first in February. Let everybody on the Hill hear me if they can. Let my accents swell to Mickleham on one side, and Dorking on the other. I saw you first in February." And then whispering: "Our companions are excessively stupid. What shall we do to rouse them? Any nonsense will serve. They shall talk. Ladies and gentlemen, I am ordered by Miss Woodhouse (who, wherever she is, presides) to say that she desires to know what you are all thinking of."

Some laughed, and answered good-humoredly. Miss Bates said a great deal; Mrs. Elton swelled at the idea of Miss Woodhouse's presiding; Mr. Knightley's answer was the most distinct.

"Is Miss Woodhouse sure that she would like to hear what we all are thinking of?"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Emma, laughing as carelessly as she could, "upon no account in the

world. It is the very last thing I would stand the brunt of just now. Let me hear anything rather than what you are all thinking of. I will not say quite all. There are one or two, perhaps," glancing at Mr. Weston and Harriet, "whose thoughts I might not be afraid of knowing."

"It is a sort of thing," cried Mrs. Elton, emphatically, "which I should not have thought myself privileged to inquire into. Though, perhaps, as the *chaperon* of the party — I never was in any circle — exploring parties — young ladies — married women —"

Her mutterings were chiefly to her husband; and he murmured, in reply, —

"Very true, my love, very true. Exactly so, indeed — quite unheard of — but some ladies say anything. Better pass it off as a joke. Everybody knows what is due to you."

"It will not do," whispered Frank to Emma. "They are most of them affronted. I will attack them with more address. Ladies and gentlemen, I am ordered by Miss Woodhouse to say that she waives her right of knowing exactly what you may all be thinking of, and only requires something very entertaining from each of you in a general way. Here are seven of you, besides myself (who, she is pleased to say, am very entertaining already), and she only demands from each of you either one thing very clever, be it prose or verse, original or repeated; or two things moderately clever; or three things very dull indeed; and she engages to laugh heartily at them all."

"Oh, very well," exclaimed Miss Bates; "then

I need not be uneasy. 'Three things very dull indeed.' That will just do for me, you know. I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as ever I open my mouth, sha'n't I?" looking round with the most good-humored dependence on everybody's assent. "Do not you all think I shall?"

Emma could not resist.

"Ah, ma'am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me, but you will be limited as to the number, — only three at once."

Miss Bates, deceived by the mock ceremony of her manner, did not immediately catch her meaning; but when it burst on her, it could not anger, though a slight blush showed that it could pain her.

"Ah! well — to be sure. Yes, I see what she means," turning to Mr. Knightley, "and I will try to hold my tongue. I must make myself very disagreeable, or she would not have said such a thing to an old friend."

"I like your plan," cried Mr. Weston. "Agreed, agreed. I will do my best. I am making a conundrum. How will a conundrum reckon?"

"Low, I am afraid, sir, very low," answered his son; "but we shall be indulgent, especially to any one who leads the way."

"No, no," said Emma, "it will not reckon low. A conundrum of Mr. Weston's shall clear him and his next neighbor. Come, sir, pray let me hear it."

"I doubt its being very clever myself," said Mr. Weston. "It is too much a matter of fact;

but here it is. What two letters of the alphabet are there that express perfection?"

"What two letters! — express perfection! I am sure I do not know."

"Ah! you will never guess. You," to Emma, "I am certain will never guess. I will tell you. M and A: Em—ma. Do you understand?"

Understanding and gratification came together. It might be a very indifferent piece of wit; but Emma found a great deal to laugh at and enjoy in it, and so did Frank and Harriet. It did not seem to touch the rest of the party equally: some looked very stupid about it; and Mr. Knightley gravely said, —

"This explains the sort of clever thing that is wanted, and Mr. Weston has done very well for himself; but he must have knocked up everybody else. Perfection should not have come quite so soon."

"Oh, for myself, I protest I must be excused," said Mrs. Elton. "I really cannot attempt — I am not at all fond of the sort of thing. I had an acrostic once sent to me upon my own name, which I was not at all pleased with. I knew who it came from. An abominable puppy! You know who I mean," nodding to her husband. "These kind of things are very well at Christmas, when one is sitting round the fire; but quite out of place, in my opinion, when one is exploring about the country in summer. Miss Woodhouse must excuse me. I am not one of those who have witty things at everybody's service. I do not pretend to be a wit. I have a great deal of vivacity in my

own way, but I really must be allowed to judge when to speak, and when to hold my tongue. Pass us if you please, Mr. Churchill. Pass Mr. E., Knightley, Jane, and myself. We have nothing clever to say, — not one of us."

"Yes, yes, pray pass me," added her husband, with a sort of sneering consciousness; "I have nothing to say that can entertain Miss Woodhouse or any other young lady. An old married man — quite good for nothing. Shall we walk, Augusta?"

"With all my heart. I am really tired of exploring so long on one spot. Come, Jane, take my other arm."

Jane declined it, however, and the husband and wife walked off. "Happy couple!" said Frank Churchill, as soon as they were out of hearing; "how well they suit one another! Very lucky — marrying as they did, upon an acquaintance formed only in a public place! They only knew each other, I think, a few weeks in Bath! Peculiarly lucky! for as to any real knowledge of a person's disposition that Bath, or any public place, can give, — it is all nothing; there can be no knowledge. It is only by seeing women in their own homes, among their own set, just as they always are, that you can form any just judgment. Short of that, it is all guess and luck — and will generally be ill-luck. How many a man has committed himself on a short acquaintance, and rued it all the rest of his life!"

Miss Fairfax, who had seldom spoken before except among her own confederates, spoke now.

"Such things do occur undoubtedly." She was stopped by a cough. Frank Churchill turned towards her to listen.

"You were speaking," said he, gravely. She recovered her voice.

"I was only going to observe that though such unfortunate circumstances do sometimes occur both to men and women, I cannot imagine them to be very frequent. A hasty and imprudent attachment may arise — but there is generally time to recover from it afterwards. I would be understood to mean that it can be only weak, irresolute characters (whose happiness must be always at the mercy of chance), who will suffer an unfortunate acquaintance to be an inconvenience, an oppression forever."

He made no answer; merely looked, and bowed in submission; and soon afterwards said in a lively tone, —

"Well, I have so little confidence in my own judgment, that whenever I marry I hope somebody will choose my wife for me. Will you?" turning to Emma. "Will you choose a wife for me? I am sure I should like anybody fixed on by you. You provide for the family, you know," with a smile at his father. "Find somebody for me. I am in no hurry. Adopt her; educate her."

"And make her like myself."

"By all means, if you can."

"Very well. I undertake the commission. You shall have a charming wife."

"She must be very lively, and have hazel eyes. I care for nothing else. I shall go abroad for a

couple of years; and when I return, I shall come to you for my wife. Remember."

Emma was in no danger of forgetting. It was a commission to touch every favorite feeling. Would not Harriet be the very creature described? Hazel eyes excepted, two years more might make her all that he wished. He might even have Harriet in his thoughts at the moment; who could say? Referring the education to her seemed to imply it.

"Now, ma'am," said Jane to her aunt, "shall we join Mrs. Elton?"

"If you please, my dear. With all my heart. I am quite ready. I was ready to have gone with her, but this will do just as well. We shall soon overtake her. There she is — no, that 's somebody else. That 's one of the ladies in the Irish car party, not at all like her. Well, I declare —"

They walked off, followed in half a minute by Mr. Knightley. Mr. Weston, his son, Emma, and Harriet, only remained; and the young man's spirits now rose to a pitch almost unpleasant. Even Emma grew tired at last of flattery and merriment, and wished herself rather walking quietly about with any of the others, or sitting almost alone, and quite unattended to, in tranquil observation of the beautiful views beneath her. The appearance of the servants looking out for them to give notice of the carriages was a joyful sight; and even the bustle of collecting and preparing to depart, and the solicitude of Mrs. Elton to have her carriage first, were gladly endured, in the prospect of the quiet drive home which was to close

the very questionable enjoyments of this day of pleasure. Such another scheme, composed of so many ill-assorted people, she hoped never to be betrayed into again.

While waiting for the carriage she found Mr. Knightley by her side. He looked around as if to see that no one were near, and then said, —

"Emma, I must once more speak to you as I have been used to do: a privilege rather endured than allowed, perhaps; but I must still use it. I cannot see you acting wrong, without a remonstrance. How could you be so unfeeling to Miss Bates? How could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation? Emma, I had not thought it possible."

Emma recollected, blushed, was sorry, but tried to laugh it off.

"Nay, how could I help saying what I did? Nobody could have helped it. It was not so very bad. I dare say she did not understand me."

"I assure you she did. She felt your full meaning. She has talked of it since. I wish you could have heard how she talked of it, — with what candor and generosity. I wish you could have heard her honoring your forbearance, in being able to pay her such attentions as she was forever receiving from yourself and your father, when her society must be so irksome."

"Oh!" cried Emma, "I know there is not a better creature in the world; but you must allow that what is good and what is ridiculous are most unfortunately blended in her."

"They are blended," said he, "I acknowledge;

and were she prosperous, I could allow much for the occasional prevalence of the ridiculous over the good. Were she a woman of fortune, I would leave her every harmless absurdity to take its chance, I would not quarrel with you for any liberties of manner. Were she your equal in situation — but, Emma, consider how far this is from being the case. She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and if she live to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done, indeed! You, whom she had known from an infant, whom she had seen grow up from a period when her notice was an honor, — to have you now, in thoughtless spirits, and the pride of the moment, laugh at her, humble her — and before her niece too — and before others, many of whom (certainly some) would be entirely guided by your treatment of her. This is not pleasant to you, Emma — and it is very far from pleasant to me; but I must, I will — I will tell you truths while I can; satisfied with proving myself your friend by very faithful counsel, and trusting that you will sometime or other do me greater justice than you can do now."

While they talked, they were advancing towards the carriage. It was ready; and before she could speak again, he had handed her in. He had misinterpreted the feelings which had kept her face averted and her tongue motionless. They were combined only of anger against herself, mortification, and deep concern. She had

not been able to speak, and on entering the carriage, sunk back for a moment overcome; then reproaching herself for having taken no leave, making no acknowledgment, parting in apparent sullenness, she looked out with voice and hand eager to show a difference; but it was just too late. He had turned away, and the horses were in motion. She continued to look back, but in vain; and soon, with what appeared unusual speed, they were half-way down the hill, and everything left far behind. She was vexed beyond what could have been expressed, — almost beyond what she could conceal. Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, at any circumstance in her life. She was most forcibly struck. The truth of his representation there was no denying. She felt it at her heart. How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates! How could she have exposed herself to such ill opinion in any one she valued! And how suffer him to leave her without saying one word of gratitude, of concurrence, of common kindness!

Time did not compose her. As she reflected more, she seemed but to feel it more. She never had been so depressed. Happily it was not necessary to speak. There was only Harriet, who seemed not in spirits herself, fagged, and very willing to be silent; and Emma felt the tears running down her cheeks almost all the way home, without being at any trouble to check them, extraordinary as they were.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE wretchedness of a scheme to Box Hill was in Emma's thoughts all the evening. How it might be considered by the rest of the party, she could not tell. They, in their different homes and their different ways, might be looking back on it with pleasure; but in her view it was a morning more completely misspent, more totally bare of rational satisfaction at the time, and more to be abhorred in recollection, than any she had ever passed. A whole evening of backgammon with her father was felicity to it. There, indeed, lay real pleasure, for there she was giving up the sweetest hours of the twenty-four to his comfort; and feeling that unmerited as might be the degree of his fond affection and confiding esteem, she could not, in her general conduct, be open to any severe reproach. As a daughter, she hoped she was not without a heart. She hoped no one could have said to her, "How could you be so unfeeling to your father? I must, I will tell you truths while I can." Miss Bates should never again — no never! If attention in future could do away the past, she might hope to be forgiven. She had been often remiss, her conscience told her so, — remiss, perhaps, more in thought than fact, — scornful, ungracious. But it should be so no more. In the

warmth of true contrition, she would call upon her the very next morning, and it should be the beginning, on her side, of a regular, equal, kindly intercourse.

She was just as determined when the morrow came, and went early, that nothing might prevent her. It was not unlikely, she thought, that she might see Mr. Knightley in her way; or, perhaps, he might come in while she were paying her visit. She had no objection. She would not be ashamed of the appearance of the penitence, so justly and truly hers. Her eyes were towards Donwell as she walked, but she saw him not.

"The ladies were all at home." She had never rejoiced at the sound before, nor ever before entered the passage, nor walked up the stairs, with any wish of giving pleasure, but in conferring obligation, or of deriving it, except in subsequent ridicule.

There was a bustle on her approach; a good deal of moving and talking. She heard Miss Bates's voice; something was to be done in a hurry; the maid looked frightened and awkward; hoped she would be pleased to wait a moment, and then ushered her in too soon. The aunt and niece seemed both escaping into the adjoining room. Jane she had a distinct glimpse of, looking extremely ill; and before the door had shut them out, she heard Miss Bates saying, "Well, my dear, I shall say you are laid down upon the bed, and I am sure you are ill enough."

Poor old Mrs. Bates, civil and humble as usual,

looked as if she did not quite understand what was going on.

"I am afraid Jane is not very well," said she, "but I do not know; they tell me she is well. I dare say my daughter will be here presently, Miss Woodhouse. I hope you find a chair. I wish Hetty had not gone. I am very little able — Have you a chair, ma'am? Do you sit where you like? I am sure she will be here presently."

Emma seriously hoped she would. She had a moment's fear of Miss Bates keeping away from her. But Miss Bates soon came — "Very happy and obliged;" but Emma's conscience told her that there was not the same cheerful volubility as before, — less ease of look and manner. A very friendly inquiry after Miss Fairfax, she hoped, might lead the way to a return of old feelings. The touch seemed immediate.

"Ah, Miss Woodhouse, how kind you are! I suppose you have heard — and are come to give us joy. This does not seem much like joy, indeed, in me," twinkling away a tear or two; "but it will be very trying for us to part with her, after having had her so long; and she has a dreadful headache just now, writing all the morning: such long letters, you know, to be written to Colonel Campbell and Mrs. Dixon. 'My dear,' said I, 'you will blind yourself,' for tears were in her eyes perpetually. One cannot wonder, one cannot wonder. It is a great change; and though she is amazingly fortunate, — such a situation, I suppose, as no young woman before ever met with on first going out; do not think us ungrate-

ful, Miss Woodhouse, for such surprising good fortune," again dispersing her tears — "but, poor dear soul! if you were to see what a headache she has. When one is in great pain, you know, one cannot feel any blessing quite as it may deserve. She is as low as possible. To look at her, nobody would think how delighted and happy she is to have secured such a situation. You will excuse her not coming to you, she is not able; she is gone into her own room. I want her to lie down upon the bed. 'My dear,' said I, 'I shall say you are laid down upon the bed:' but, however, she is not; she is walking about the room. But now that she has written her letters, she says she shall soon be well. She will be extremely sorry to miss seeing you, Miss Woodhouse, but your kindness will excuse her. You were kept waiting at the door; I was quite ashamed; but somehow there was a little bustle; for it so happened that we had not heard the knock; and till you were on the stairs, we did not know anybody was coming. 'It is only Mrs. Cole,' said I, 'depend upon it; nobody else would come so early.' 'Well,' said she, 'it must be borne sometime or other, and it may as well be now.' But then Patty came in, and said it was you. 'Oh!' said I, 'it is Miss Woodhouse. I am sure you will like to see her.' 'I can see nobody,' said she, and up she got, and would go away; and that was what made us keep you waiting; and extremely sorry and ashamed we were. 'If you must go, my dear,' said I, 'you must, and I will say you are laid down upon the bed.'"

Emma was most sincerely interested. Her heart had been long growing kinder towards Jane; and this picture of her present sufferings acted as a cure of every former ungenerous suspicion, and left her nothing but pity; and the remembrance of the less just and less gentle sensations of the past obliged her to admit that Jane might very naturally resolve on seeing Mrs. Cole, or any other steady friend, when she might not bear to see herself. She spoke as she felt, with earnest regret and solicitude; sincerely wishing that the circumstances which she collected from Miss Bates to be now actually determined on, might be as much for Miss Fairfax's advantage and comfort as possible. "It must be a severe trial to them all. She had understood it was to be delayed till Colonel Campbell's return."

"So very kind!" replied Miss Bates; "but you are always kind."

There was no bearing such an "always;" and to break through her dreadful gratitude, Emma made the direct inquiry of —

"Where, may I ask, is Miss Fairfax going?"

"To a Mrs. Smallridge, — charming woman, — most superior, — to have the charge of her three little girls, — delightful children. Impossible that any situation could be more replete with comfort, if we except, perhaps, Mrs. Suckling's own family and Mrs. Bragge's; but Mrs. Smallridge is intimate with both, and in the very same neighborhood, — lives only four miles from Maple Grove. Jane will be only four miles from Maple Grove."

"Mrs. Elton, I suppose, has been the person to whom Miss Fairfax owes —"

"Yes, our good Mrs. Elton. The most indefatigable, true friend. She would not take a denial. She would not let Jane say 'No;' for when Jane first heard of it (it was the day before yesterday, the very morning we were at Donwell), when Jane first heard of it, she was quite decided against accepting the offer, and for the reasons you mention; exactly as you say, she had made up her mind to close with nothing till Colonel Campbell's return, and nothing should induce her to enter into any engagement at present — and so she told Mrs. Elton over and over again — and I am sure I had no more idea that she would change her mind; but that good Mrs. Elton, whose judgment never fails her, saw farther than I did. It is not everybody that would have stood out in such a kind way as she did, and refused to take Jane's answer; but she positively declared she would not write any such denial yesterday, as Jane wished her; she would wait — and sure enough yesterday evening, it was all settled that Jane should go. Quite a surprise to me! I had not the least idea! — Jane took Mrs. Elton aside, and told her at once that upon thinking over the advantages of Mrs. Suckling's situation, she had come to the resolution of accepting it. I did not know a word of it till it was all settled."

"You spent the evening with Mrs. Elton?"

"Yes, all of us; Mrs. Elton would have us come. It was settled so upon the Hill, while we were walking about with Mr. Knightley. 'You

must all spend your evening with us,' said she, — 'I positively must have you all come.'"

"Mr. Knightley was there too, was he?"

"No, not Mr. Knightley; he declined it from the first; and though I thought he would come, because Mrs. Elton declared she would not let him off, he did not; but my mother and Jane and I were all there, and a very agreeable evening we had. Such kind friends, you know, Miss Woodhouse, one must always find agreeable, though everybody seemed rather fagged after the morning's party. Even pleasure, you know, is fatiguing, — and I cannot say that any of them seemed very much to have enjoyed it. However, I shall always think it a very pleasant party, and feel extremely obliged to the kind friends who included me in it."

"Miss Fairfax, I suppose, though you were not aware of it, had been making up her mind the whole day."

"I dare say she had."

"Whenever the time may come, it must be unwelcome to her and all her friends; but I hope her engagement will have every alleviation that is possible, — I mean, as to the character and manners of the family."

"Thank you, dear Miss Woodhouse. Yes, indeed, there is everything in the world that can make her happy in it. Except the Sucklings and Bragges, there is not such another nursery establishment, so liberal and elegant, in all Mrs. Elton's acquaintance. Mrs. Smallridge, a most delightful woman! A style of living almost equal to Maple

Grove, — and as to the children, except the little Sucklings and little Bragges, there are not such elegant, sweet children anywhere. Jane will be treated with such regard and kindness! It will be nothing but pleasure, a life of pleasure. And her salary — I really cannot venture to name her salary to you, Miss Woodhouse. Even you, used as you are, to great sums, would hardly believe that so much could be given to a young person like Jane."

"Ah, madam," cried Emma, "if other children are at all like what I remember to have been myself, I should think five times the amount of what I have ever yet heard named as a salary on such occasions dearly earned."

"You are so noble in your ideas."

"And when is Miss Fairfax to leave you?"

"Very soon, very soon, indeed; that 's the worst of it. Within a fortnight. Mrs. Smallridge is in a great hurry. My poor mother does not know how to bear it. So, then, I try to put it out of her thoughts, and say, 'Come, ma'am, do not let us think about it any more.'"

"Her friends must all be sorry to lose her; and will not Colonel and Mrs. Campbell be sorry to find that she has engaged herself before their return?"

"Yes. Jane says she is sure they will; but yet this is such a situation as she cannot feel herself justified in declining. I was so astonished when she first told me what she had been saying to Mrs. Elton, and when Mrs. Elton at the same moment came congratulating me upon it. It was before

tea —stay — no, it could not be before tea, because we were just going to cards — and yet it was before tea, because I remember thinking — oh, no, now I recollect, now I have it; something happened before tea, but not that. Mr. Elton was called out of the room before tea, old John Abdy's son wanted to speak with him. Poor old John, I have a great regard for him; he was clerk to my poor father twenty-seven years; and now, poor old man, he is bed-ridden, and very poorly with the rheumatic gout in his joints — I must go and see him to-day; and so will Jane, I am sure, if she gets out at all. And poor John's son came to talk to Mr. Elton about relief from the parish: he is very well-to-do himself, you know, being head man at the Crown, ostler, and everything of that sort, but still he cannot keep his father without some help; and so when Mr. Elton came back, he told us what John ostler had been telling him, and then it came out about the chaise having been sent to Randalls to take Mr. Frank Churchill to Richmond. That was what happened before tea. It was after tea that Jane spoke to Mrs. Elton."

Miss Bates would hardly give Emma time to say how perfectly new this circumstance was to her; but as without supposing it possible that she could be ignorant of any of the particulars of Mr. Frank Churchill's going, she proceeded to give them all, it was of no consequence.

What Mr. Elton had learned from the ostler on the subject, being the accumulation of the ostler's own knowledge, and the knowledge of the servants at Randalls, was that a messenger had come over

from Richmond soon after the return of the party from Box Hill, — which messenger, however, had been no more than was expected; and that Mr. Churchill had sent his nephew a few lines, containing, upon the whole, a tolerable account of Mrs. Churchill, and only wishing him not to delay coming back beyond the next morning early; but that Mr. Frank Churchill having resolved to go home directly, without waiting at all, and his horse seeming to have got a cold, Tom had been sent off immediately for the Crown chaise, and the ostler had stood out and seen it pass by, the boy going a good pace, and driving very steady.

There was nothing in all this either to astonish or interest, and it caught Emma's attention only as it united with the subject which already engaged her mind. The contrast between Mrs. Churchill's importance in the world, and Jane Fairfax's, struck her; one was everything, the other nothing, — and she sat musing on the difference of woman's destiny, and quite unconscious on what her eyes were fixed, till roused by Miss Bates's saying, —

"Ay, I see what you are thinking of, the pianoforte. What is to become of that? Very true. Poor dear Jane was talking of it just now. 'You must go,' said she. 'You and I must part. You will have no business here. Let it stay, however,' said she; 'give it house-room till Colonel Campbell comes back. I shall talk about it to him; he will settle for me; he will help me out of all my difficulties.' — And to this day, I do believe, she knows not whether it was his present or his daughter's."

Now Emma was obliged to think of the pianoforte; and the remembrance of all her former fanciful and unfair conjectures was so little pleasing that she soon allowed herself to believe her visit had been long enough; and with a repetition of everything that she could venture to say of the good wishes which she really felt, took leave.

CHAPTER XVII.

EMMA'S pensive meditations, as she walked home, were not interrupted; but on entering the parlor, she found those who must rouse her. Mr. Knightley and Harriet had arrived during her absence, and were sitting with her father. Mr. Knightley immediately got up, and in a manner decidedly graver than usual, said, —

"I would not go away without seeing you, but I have no time to spare, and therefore must now be gone directly. I am going to London, to spend a few days with John and Isabella. Have you anything to send or say, besides the 'love,' which nobody carries?"

"Nothing at all. But is not this a sudden scheme?"

"Yes — rather — I have been thinking of it some little time."

Emma was sure he had not forgiven her; he looked unlike himself. Time, however, she thought, would tell him that they ought to be friends again. While he stood, as if meaning to go, but not going, her father began his inquiries.

"Well, my dear, and did you get there safely? And how did you find my worthy old friend and her daughter? I dare say they must have been very much obliged to you for coming. — Dear

Emma has been to call on Mrs. and Miss Bates, Mr. Knightley, as I told you before. She is always so attentive to them."

Emma's color was heightened by this unjust praise; and with a smile and shake of the head, which spoke much, she looked at Mr. Knightley. It seemed as if there were an instantaneous impression in her favor, as if his eyes received the truth from hers, and all that had passed of good in her feelings were at once caught and honored. He looked at her with a glow of regard. She was warmly gratified, and in another moment still more so, by a little movement of more than common friendliness on his part. He took her hand; whether she had not herself made the first motion, she could not say — she might, perhaps, have rather offered it — but he took her hand, pressed it, and certainly was on the point of carrying it to his lips — when, from some fancy or other, he suddenly let it go. Why he should feel such a scruple, why he should change his mind when it was all but done, she could not perceive. He would have judged better, she thought, if he had not stopped. The intention, however, was indubitable; and whether it was that his manners had in general so little gallantry, or however else it happened, but she thought nothing became him more. It was, with him, of so simple yet so dignified a nature. She could not but recall the attempt with great satisfaction. It spoke such perfect amity. He left them immediately afterwards, — gone in a moment. He always moved with the alertness of a mind which could neither be undecided nor dila-

tory, but now he seemed more sudden than usual in his disappearance.

Emma could not regret her having gone to Miss Bates, but she wished she had left her ten minutes earlier, — it would have been a great pleasure to talk over Jane Fairfax's situation with Mr. Knightley. Neither would she regret that he should be going to Brunswick Square, for she knew how much his visit would be enjoyed; but it might have happened at a better time, and to have had longer notice of it would have been pleasanter. They parted thorough friends, however; she could not be deceived as to the meaning of his countenance and his unfinished gallantry; — it was all done to assure her that she had fully recovered his good opinion. He had been sitting with them half an hour, she found. It was a pity that she had not come back earlier.

In the hope of diverting her father's thoughts from the disagreeableness of Mr. Knightley's going to London, and going so suddenly, and going on horseback, which she knew would be all very bad, Emma communicated her news of Jane Fairfax; and her dependence on the effect was justified: it supplied a very useful check, — interested, without disturbing him. He had long made up his mind to Jane Fairfax's going out as governess, and could talk of it cheerfully; but Mr. Knightley's going to London had been an unexpected blow.

"I am very glad, indeed, my dear, to hear she is to be so comfortably settled. Mrs. Elton is very good-natured and agreeable, and I dare say her ac-

quaintance are just what they ought to be. I hope it is a dry situation, and that her health will be taken good care of. It ought to be a first object, as I am sure poor Miss Taylor's always was with me. You know, my dear, she is going to be to this new lady what Miss Taylor was to us. And I hope she will be better off in one respect, and not be induced to go away after it has been her home so long."

The following day brought news from Richmond to throw everything else into the background. An express arrived at Randalls to announce the death of Mrs. Churchill. Though her nephew had had no particular reason to hasten back on her account, she had not lived above six-and-thirty hours after his return. A sudden seizure, of a different nature from anything foreboded by her general state, had carried her off after a short struggle. The great Mrs. Churchill was no more.

It was felt as such things must be felt. Everybody had a degree of gravity and sorrow; tenderness towards the departed, solicitude for the surviving friends; and in a reasonable time, curiosity to know where she would be buried. Goldsmith tells us that when lovely woman stoops to folly, she has nothing to do but to die; and when she stoops to be disagreeable, it is equally to be recommended as a clearer of ill fame. Mrs. Churchill, after being disliked at least twenty-five years, was now spoken of with compassionate allowances. In one point she was fully justified. She had never been admitted before to be seriously ill. The event acquitted her of all the

fancifulness and all the selfishness of imaginary complaints.

"Poor Mrs. Churchill! no doubt she had been suffering a great deal, — more than anybody had ever supposed, — and continual pain would try the temper. It was a sad event, a great shock. With all her faults, what would Mr. Churchill do without her? Mr. Churchill's loss would be dreadful, indeed. Mr. Churchill would never get over it." Even Mr. Weston shook his head, and looked solemn, and said, "Ah, poor woman, who would have thought it!" and resolved that his mourning should be as handsome as possible; and his wife sat sighing and moralizing over her broad hems with a commiseration and good sense true and steady. How it would affect Frank was among the earliest thoughts of both. It was also a very early speculation with Emma. The character of Mrs. Churchill, the grief of her husband, — her mind glanced over them both with awe and compassion, and then rested with lightened feelings on how Frank might be affected by the event, how benefited, how freed. She saw in a moment all the possible good. Now an attachment to Harriet Smith would have nothing to encounter. Mr. Churchill, independent of his wife, was feared by nobody; an easy, guidable man, to be persuaded into anything by his nephew. All that remained to be wished was that the nephew should form the attachment, as, with all her good will in the cause, Emma could feel no certainty of its being already formed.

Harriet behaved extremely well on the occasion,

with great self-command. Whatever she might feel of brighter hope, she betrayed nothing. Emma was gratified to observe such a proof in her of strengthened character, and refrained from any allusion that might endanger its maintenance. They spoke, therefore, of Mrs. Churchill's death with mutual forbearance.

Short letters from Frank were received at Randalls, communicating all that was immediately important of their state and plans. Mr. Churchill was better than could be expected; and their first removal, on the departure of the funeral for Yorkshire, was to be to the house of a very old friend in Windsor, to whom Mr. Churchill had been promising a visit the last ten years. At present, there was nothing to be done for Harriet; good wishes for the future were all that could yet be possible on Emma's side.

It was a more pressing concern to show attention to Jane Fairfax, whose prospects were closing, while Harriet's opened, and whose engagements now allowed of no delay in any one at Highbury who wished to show her kindness, — and with Emma it was grown into a first wish. She had scarcely a stronger regret than for her past coldness; and the person whom she had been so many months neglecting was now the very one on whom she would have lavished every distinction of regard or sympathy. She wanted to be of use to her; wanted to show a value for her society, and testify respect and consideration. She resolved to prevail on her to spend a day at Hartfield. A note was written to urge it. The invitation was refused,

and by a verbal message. "Miss Fairfax was not well enough to write;" and when Mr. Perry called at Hartfield, the same morning, it appeared that she was so much indisposed as to have been visited, though against her own consent, by himself, and that she was suffering under severe headaches, and a nervous fever to a degree which made him doubt the possibility of her going to Mrs. Smallridge's at the time proposed. Her health seemed for the moment completely deranged, — appetite quite gone, — and though there were no absolutely alarming symptoms, nothing touching the pulmonary complaint, which was the standing apprehension of the family, Mr. Perry was uneasy about her. He thought she had undertaken more than she was equal to, and that she felt it so herself, though she would not own it. Her spirits seemed overcome. Her present home, he could not but observe, was unfavorable to a nervous disorder, — confined always to one room, — he could have wished it otherwise; and her good aunt, though his very old friend, he must acknowledge to be not the best companion for an invalid of that description. Her care and attention could not be questioned; they were, in fact, only too great. He very much feared that Miss Fairfax derived more evil than good from them. Emma listened with the warmest concern; grieved for her more and more, and looked around eager to discover some way of being useful. To take her — be it only an hour or two — from her aunt, to give her change of air and scene, and quiet rational conversation, even for an hour or two, might do her good; and

the following morning she wrote again to say, in the most feeling language she could command, that she would call for her in the carriage at any hour that Jane would name, mentioning that she had Mr. Perry's decided opinion in favor of such exercise for his patient. The answer was only in this short note: —

"Miss Fairfax's compliments and thanks, but is quite unequal to any exercise."

Emma felt that her own note had deserved something better; but it was impossible to quarrel with words whose tremulous inequality showed indisposition so plainly, and she thought only of how she might best counteract this unwillingness to be seen or assisted. In spite of the answer, therefore, she ordered the carriage, and drove to Mrs. Bates's, in the hope that Jane would be induced to join her; but it would not do. Miss Bates came to the carriage door, all gratitude, and agreeing with her most earnestly in thinking an airing might be of the greatest service; and everything that message could do was tried: but all in vain. Miss Bates was obliged to return without success; Jane was quite unpersuadable; the mere proposal of going out seemed to make her worse. Emma wished she could have seen her, and tried her own powers; but almost before she could hint the wish, Miss Bates made it appear that she had promised her niece on no account to let Miss Woodhouse in. "Indeed, the truth was that poor, dear Jane could not bear to see anybody — anybody at all — Mrs. Elton, indeed, could not be denied — and

Mrs. Cole had made such a point — and Mrs. Perry had said so much — but, except them, Jane would really see nobody."

Emma did not want to be classed with the Mrs. Eltons, the Mrs. Perrys, and the Mrs. Coles, who would force themselves anywhere; neither could she feel any right of preference herself. She submitted, therefore, and only questioned Miss Bates further as to her niece's appetite and diet, which she longed to be able to assist. On that subject poor Miss Bates was very unhappy and very communicative. Jane would hardly eat anything: Mr. Perry recommended nourishing food; but everything they could command (and never had anybody such good neighbors) was distasteful.

Emma, on reaching home, called the housekeeper directly to an examination of her stores; and some arrow-root of very superior quality was speedily despatched to Miss Bates with a most friendly note. In half an hour the arrow-root was returned, with a thousand thanks from Miss Bates, but "dear Jane would not be satisfied without its being sent back: it was a thing she could not take — and, moreover, she insisted on her saying that she was not at all in want of anything."

When Emma afterwards heard that Jane Fairfax had been seen wandering about the meadows, at some distance from Highbury, on the afternoon of the very day on which she had, under the plea of being unequal to any exercise, so peremptorily refused to go out with her in the carriage, she could have no doubt — putting everything together — that Jane was resolved to receive no kindness

from her. She was sorry, very sorry. Her heart was grieved for a state which seemed but the more pitiable from this sort of irritation of spirits, inconsistency of action, and inequality of powers; and it mortified her that she was given so little credit for proper feeling, or esteemed so little worthy as a friend: but she had the consolation of knowing that her intentions were good, and of being able to say to herself that could Mr. Knightley have been privy to all her attempts of assisting Jane Fairfax, could he even have seen into her heart, he would not on this occasion have found anything to reprove.

CHAPTER XVIII.

One morning, about ten days after Mrs. Churchill's decease, Emma was called downstairs to Mr. Weston, who "could not stay five minutes, and wanted particularly to speak with her." He met her at the parlor door, and hardly asking her how she did, in the natural key of his voice, sunk it immediately, to say, unheard by her father, —

"Can you come to Randalls at any time this morning? Do, if it be possible. Mrs. Weston wants to see you. She must see you."

"Is she unwell?"

"No, no, not at all, — only a little agitated. She would have ordered the carriage, and come to you, but she must see you alone; and that you know," nodding towards her father — "Humph! can you come?"

"Certainly. This moment, if you please. It is impossible to refuse what you ask in such a way, but what can be the matter? Is she really not ill?"

"Depend upon me, but ask no more questions. You will know it all in time. The most unaccountable business! But hush, hush!"

To guess what all this meant was impossible even for Emma. Something really important seemed announced by his looks; but as her friend

was well, she endeavored not to be uneasy, and settling it with her father that she would take her walk now, she and Mr. Weston were soon out of the house together, and on their way at a quick pace for Randalls.

"Now," said Emma, when they were fairly beyond the sweep gates, — "now, Mr. Weston, do let me know what has happened."

"No, no," he gravely replied. "Don't ask me. I promised my wife to leave it all to her. She will break it to you better than I can. Do not be impatient, Emma; it will all come out too soon."

"Break it to me," cried Emma, standing still with terror. "Good God! Mr. Weston, tell me at once. Something has happened in Brunswick Square. I know it has. Tell me, I charge you, tell me this moment what it is."

"No, indeed, you are mistaken."

"Mr. Weston, do not trifle with me. Consider how many of my dearest friends are now in Brunswick Square. Which of them is it? I charge you by all that is sacred not to attempt concealment."

"Upon my word, Emma."

"Your word! why not your honor? why not say upon your honor, that it has nothing to do with any of them? Good heavens! What can be to be broke to me, that does relate to one of that family?"

"Upon my honor," said he, very seriously, "it does not. It is not in the smallest degree connected with any human being of the name of Knightley."

Emma's courage returned, and she walked on.

"I was wrong," he continued, "in talking of its being broke to you. I should not have used the expression. In fact, it does not concern you, it concerns only myself; that is, we hope — Humph! In short, my dear Emma, there is no occasion to be so uneasy about it. I don't say that it is not a disagreeable business, but things might be much worse. If we walk fast, we shall soon be at Randalls."

Emma found that she must wait; and now it required little effort. She asked no more questions, therefore, merely employed her own fancy; and that soon pointed out to her the probability of its being some money concern,— something just come to light of a disagreeable nature in the circumstances of the family, something which the late event at Richmond had brought forward. Her fancy was very active. Half-a-dozen natural children, perhaps, and poor Frank cut off! This, though very undesirable, would be no matter of agony to her. It inspired little more than an animating curiosity.

"Who is that gentleman on horseback?" said she, as they proceeded; speaking more to assist Mr. Weston in keeping his secret than with any other view.

"I do not know. One of the Otways. — Not Frank; it is not Frank, I assure you. You will not see him. He is half-way to Windsor by this time."

"Has your son been with you, then?"

"Oh, yes, did you not know? Well, well, never mind."

For a moment he was silent; and then added, in a tone much more guarded and demure, —

"Yes, Frank came over this morning, just to ask us how we did."

They hurried on, and were speedily at Randalls.

"Well, my dear," said he, as they entered the room, "I have brought her, and now I hope you will soon be better: I shall leave you together. There is no use in delay. I shall not be far off, if you want me." And Emma distinctly heard him add in a lower tone, before he quitted the room: "I have been as good as my word. She has not the least idea."

Mrs. Weston was looking so ill, and had an air of so much perturbation, that Emma's uneasiness increased; and the moment they were alone, she eagerly said, —

"What is it, my dear friend? Something of a very unpleasant nature, I find, has occurred; do let me know directly what it is. I have been walking all this way in complete suspense. We both abhor suspense. Do not let mine continue longer. It will do you good to speak of your distress, whatever it may be."

"Have you, indeed, no idea?" said Mrs. Weston, in a trembling voice. "Cannot you, my dear Emma, — cannot you form a guess as to what you are to hear?"

"So far as that it relates to Mr. Frank Churchill, I do guess."

"You are right. It does relate to him, and I will tell you directly," resuming her work, and seeming resolved against looking up. "He has

been here this very morning, on a most extraordinary errand. It is impossible to express our surprise. He came to speak to his father on a subject, — to announce an attachment — "

She stopped to breathe. Emma thought first of herself and then of Harriet.

"More than an attachment, indeed," resumed Mrs. Weston; "an engagement, — a positive engagement. What will you say, Emma, — what will anybody say, — when it is known that Frank Churchill and Miss Fairfax are engaged; nay, that they have been long engaged?"

Emma even jumped with surprise; and horror-struck, exclaimed, —

"Jane Fairfax! Good God! You are not serious? You do not mean it?"

"You may well be amazed," returned Mrs. Weston, still averting her eyes, and talking on with eagerness, that Emma might have time to recover, — "you may well be amazed. But it is even so. There has been a solemn engagement between them ever since October, — formed at Weymouth, and kept a secret from everybody. Not a creature knowing it but themselves, — neither the Campbells, nor her family, nor his. It is so wonderful that, though perfectly convinced of the fact, it is yet almost incredible to myself. I can hardly believe it. I thought I knew him."

Emma scarcely heard what was said. Her mind was divided between two ideas, — her own former conversations with him about Miss Fairfax, and poor Harriet, — and for some time she could only exclaim, and require confirmation, repeated confirmation.

"Well!" said she at last, trying to recover herself; "this is a circumstance which I must think of at least half a day, before I can at all comprehend it. What! — engaged to her all the winter — before either of them came to Highbury?"

"Engaged since October, — secretly engaged. It has hurt me, Emma, very much. It has hurt his father equally. Some part of his conduct we cannot excuse."

Emma pondered a moment, and then replied, "I will not pretend not to understand you; and to give you all the relief in my power, be assured that no such effect has followed his attentions to me as you are apprehensive of."

Mrs. Weston looked up, afraid to believe; but Emma's countenance was as steady as her words.

"That you may have less difficulty in believing this boast of my present perfect indifference," she continued, "I will further tell you that there was a period in the early part of our acquaintance when I did like him, when I was very much disposed to be attached to him, — nay, was attached; and how it came to cease is perhaps the wonder. Fortunately, however, it did cease. I have really for some time past, for at least these three months, cared nothing about him. You may believe me, Mrs. Weston. This is the simple truth."

Mrs. Weston kissed her with tears of joy; and when she could find utterance, assured her that this protestation had done her more good than anything else in the world could do.

"Mr. Weston will be almost as much relieved

as myself," said she. "On this point we have been wretched. It was our darling wish that you might be attached to each other, and we were persuaded that it was so. Imagine what we have been feeling on your account."

"I have escaped; and that I should escape may be a matter of grateful wonder to you and myself. But this does not acquit him, Mrs. Weston; and I must say that I think him greatly to blame. What right had he to come among us with affection and faith engaged, and with manners so very disengaged? What right had he to endeavor to please, as he certainly did, — to distinguish any one young woman with persevering attention, as he certainly did, while he really belonged to another? How could he tell what mischief he might be doing? How could he tell that he might not be making me in love with him? Very wrong, very wrong indeed."

"From something that he said, my dear Emma, I rather imagine — "

"And how could she bear such behavior? Composure with a witness! To look on, while repeated attentions were offering to another woman before her face, and not resent it! That is a degree of placidity which I can neither comprehend nor respect."

"There were misunderstandings between them, Emma; he said so expressly. He had not time to enter into much explanation. He was here only a quarter of an hour, and in a state of agitation which did not allow the full use even of the time he could stay; but that there had been mis-

understandings he decidedly said. The present crisis, indeed, seemed to be brought on by them; and those misunderstandings might very possibly arise from the impropriety of his conduct."

"Impropriety! Oh! Mrs. Weston, it is too calm a censure. Much, much beyond impropriety! It has sunk him — I cannot say how it has sunk him in my opinion. So unlike what a man should be! None of that upright integrity, that strict adherence to truth and principle, that disdain of trick and littleness, which a man should display in every transaction of his life."

"Nay, dear Emma, now I must take his part; for though he has been wrong in this instance, I have known him long enough to answer for his having many, very many good qualities; and —"

"Good God!" cried Emma, not attending to her. "Mrs. Smallridge too! Jane actually on the point of going as governess! What could he mean by such horrible indelicacy? To suffer her to engage herself, — to suffer her even to think of such a measure!"

"He knew nothing about it, Emma. On this article I can fully acquit him. It was a private resolution of hers, not communicated to him, or at least not communicated in a way to carry conviction. Till yesterday, I know, he said he was in the dark as to her plans. They burst on him, I do not know how, but by some letter or message; and it was the discovery of what she was doing, of this very project of hers, which determined him to come forward at once, own it all to his uncle, throw

himself on his kindness, and in short, put an end to the miserable state of concealment that had been carrying on so long."

Emma began to listen better.

"I am to hear from him soon," continued Mrs. Weston. "He told me, at parting, that he should soon write; and he spoke in a manner which seemed to promise me many particulars that could not be given now. Let us wait, therefore, for this letter. It may bring many extenuations. It may make many things intelligible and excusable which now are not to be understood. Don't let us be severe; don't let us be in a hurry to condemn him. Let us have patience. I must love him; and now that I am satisfied on one point, the one material point, I am sincerely anxious for its all turning out well, and ready to hope that it may. They must both have suffered a great deal under such a system of secrecy and concealment."

"His sufferings," replied Emma, dryly, "do not appear to have done him much harm. Well, and how did Mr. Churchill take it?"

"Most favorably for his nephew, — gave his consent with scarcely a difficulty. Conceive what the events of a week have done in that family! While poor Mrs. Churchill lived, I suppose there could not have been a hope, a chance, a possibility; but scarcely are her remains at rest in the family vault than her husband is persuaded to act exactly opposite to what she would have required. What a blessing it is, when undue influence does not survive the grave! He gave his consent with very little persuasion."

"Ah!" thought Emma, "he would have done as much for Harriet."

"This was settled last night, and Frank was off with the light this morning. He stopped at Highbury, at the Bateses', I fancy, some time, and then came on hither; but was in such a hurry to get back to his uncle, to whom he is just now more necessary than ever, that, as I tell you, he could stay with us but a quarter of an hour. He was very much agitated, — very much indeed, — to a degree that made him appear quite a different creature from anything I had ever seen him before. In addition to all the rest, there had been the shock of finding her so very unwell, which he had had no previous suspicion of, and there was every appearance of his having been feeling a great deal."

"And do you really believe the affair to have been carrying on with such perfect secrecy? The Campbells, the Dixons, — did none of them know of the engagement?"

Emma could not speak the name of Dixon without a little blush.

"None; not one. He positively said that it had been known to no being in the world but their two selves."

"Well," said Emma, "I suppose we shall gradually grow reconciled to the idea, and I wish them very happy. But I shall always think it a very abominable sort of proceeding. What has it been but a system of hypocrisy and deceit, espionage and treachery? To come among us with professions of openness and simplicity; and such a league in

secret to judge us all! — Here have we been the whole winter and spring completely duped, fancying ourselves all on an equal footing of truth and honor, with two people in the midst of us who may have been carrying round, comparing and sitting in judgment on sentiments and words that were never meant for both to hear. — They must take the consequence, if they have heard each other spoken of in a way not perfectly agreeable!"

"I am quite easy on that head," replied Mrs. Weston. "I am very sure that I never said anything of either to the other which both might not have heard."

"You are in luck. Your only blunder was confined to my ear when you imagined a certain friend of ours in love with the lady."

"True. But as I have always had a thoroughly good opinion of Miss Fairfax, I never could under any blunder have spoken ill of her; and as to speaking ill of him, there I must have been safe."

At this moment Mr. Weston appeared at a little distance from the window, evidently on the watch. His wife gave him a look which invited him in; and while he was coming round added: "Now, dearest Emma, let me entreat you to say and look everything that may set his heart at ease and incline him to be satisfied with the match. Let us make the best of it, — and, indeed, almost everything may be fairly said in her favor. It is not a connection to gratify; but if Mr. Churchill does not feel that, why should we? and it may be a very fortunate circumstance for him, — for Frank, I mean, — that he should have attached himself to

a girl of such steadiness of character and good judgment as I have always given her credit for, and still am disposed to give her credit for in spite of this one great deviation from the strict rule of right. And how much may be said in her situation for even that error!"

"Much, indeed!" cried Emma, feelingly. "If a woman can ever be excused for thinking only of herself, it is in a situation like Jane Fairfax's. Of such one may almost say that 'the world is not theirs, nor the world's law.'"

She met Mr. Weston on his entrance with a smiling countenance, exclaiming, —

"A very pretty trick you have been playing me, upon my word! This was a device, I suppose, to sport with my curiosity, and exercise my talent of guessing. But you really frightened me. I thought you had lost half your property at least. And here, instead of its being a matter of condolence, it turns out to be one of congratulation. I congratulate you, Mr. Weston, with all my heart, on the prospect of having one of the most lovely and accomplished young women in England for your daughter."

A glance or two between him and his wife convinced him that all was as right as this speech proclaimed; and its happy effect on his spirits was immediate. His air and voice recovered their usual briskness; he shook her heartily and gratefully by the hand, and entered on the subject in a manner to prove that he now only wanted time and persuasion to think the engagement no very bad thing. His companions suggested only what

could palliate imprudence or smooth objections; and by the time they had talked it all over together, and he had talked it all over again with Emma in their walk back to Hartfield, he was become perfectly reconciled, and not far from thinking it the very best thing that Frank could possibly have done.

CHAPTER XIX.

"HARRIET, poor Harriet!" — Those were the words; in them lay the tormenting ideas which Emma could not get rid of, and which constituted the real misery of the business to her. Frank Churchill had behaved very ill by herself, — very ill in many ways, — but it was not so much his behavior as her own, which made her so angry with him. It was the scrape which he had drawn her into on Harriet's account, that gave the deepest hue to his offence. Poor Harriet! to be a second time the dupe of her misconceptions and flattery. Mr. Knightley had spoken prophetically when he once said, "Emma, you have been no friend to Harriet Smith." — She was afraid she had done her nothing but disservice. — It was true that she had not to charge herself in this instance, as in the former, with being the sole and original author of the mischief; with having suggested such feelings as might otherwise never have entered Harriet's imagination; for Harriet had acknowledged her admiration and preference of Frank Churchill before she had ever given her a hint on the subject; but she felt completely guilty of having encouraged what she might have repressed. She might have prevented the indulgence and increase of such sentiments. Her

influence would have been enough. And now she was very conscious that she ought to have prevented them. — She felt that she had been risking her friend's happiness on most insufficient grounds. Common sense would have directed her to tell Harriet that she must not allow herself to think of him, and that there were five hundred chances to one against his ever caring for her. — "But with common sense," she added, "I am afraid I have had little to do."

She was extremely angry with herself. If she could not have been angry with Frank Churchill too, it would have been dreadful. As for Jane Fairfax, she might at least relieve her feelings from any present solicitude on her account. Harriet would be anxiety enough; she need no longer be unhappy about Jane, whose troubles and whose ill health, having of course the same origin, must be equally under cure. Her days of insignificance and evil were over. She would soon be well and happy and prosperous. Emma could now imagine why her own attentions had been slighted. This discovery laid many smaller matters open. No doubt it had been from jealousy. In Jane's eyes she had been a rival; and well might anything she could offer of assistance or regard be repulsed. An airing in the Hartfield carriage would have been the rack, and arrow-root from the Hartfield store-room must have been poison. She understood it all; and as far as her mind could disengage itself from the injustice and selfishness of angry feelings, she acknowledged that Jane Fairfax would have neither elevation nor happi-

ness beyond her desert. But poor Harriet was such an engrossing charge! There was little sympathy to be spared for anybody else. Emma was sadly fearful that this second disappointment would be more severe than the first. Considering the very superior claims of the object, it ought; and judging by its apparently stronger effect on Harriet's mind, it would produce reserve and self-command. She must communicate the painful truth, however, and as soon as possible. An injunction of secrecy had been among Mr. Weston's parting words. "For the present the whole affair was to be completely a secret. Mr. Churchill had made a point of it as a token of respect to the wife he had so very recently lost; and everybody admitted it to be no more than due decorum." Emma had promised; but still Harriet must be excepted. It was her superior duty.

In spite of her vexation she could not help feeling it almost ridiculous that she should have the very same distressing and delicate office to perform by Harriet which Mrs. Weston had just gone through by herself. The intelligence which had been so anxiously announced to her, she was now to be anxiously announcing to another. Her heart beat quick on hearing Harriet's footstep and voice; so, she supposed, had poor Mrs. Weston felt when she was approaching Randalls. Could the event of the disclosure bear an equal resemblance! But of that, unfortunately, there could be no chance.

"Well, Miss Woodhouse," cried Harriet, coming eagerly into the room, "is not this the oddest news that ever was?"

"What news do you mean?" replied Emma, unable to guess by look or voice whether Harriet could indeed have received any hint.

"About Jane Fairfax. Did you ever hear anything so strange? Oh! — you need not be afraid of owning it to me, for Mr. Weston has told me himself. I met him just now. He told me it was to be a great secret; and therefore I should not think of mentioning it to anybody but you, but he said you knew it."

"What did Mr. Weston tell you?" said Emma, still perplexed.

"Oh! he told me all about it; that Jane Fairfax and Mr. Frank Churchill are to be married, and that they have been privately engaged to one another this long while. How very odd!"

It was, indeed, so odd, Harriet's behavior was so extremely odd, that Emma did not know how to understand it. Her character appeared absolutely changed. She seemed to propose showing no agitation or disappointment or peculiar concern in the discovery. Emma looked at her, quite unable to speak.

"Had you any idea," cried Harriet, "of his being in love with her? You, perhaps, might. You," blushing as she spoke, "who can see into everybody's heart; but nobody else —"

"Upon my word," said Emma, "I begin to doubt my having any such talent. Can you seriously ask me, Harriet, whether I imagined him attached to another woman at the very time that I was — tacitly, if not openly — encouraging you to give way to your own feelings? I never had the slight-

est suspicion, till within the last hour, of Mr. Frank Churchill's having the least regard for Jane Fairfax. You may be very sure that if I had, I should have cautioned you accordingly."

"Me!" cried Harriet, coloring, and astonished. "Why should you caution me? You do not think I care about Mr. Frank Churchill."

"I am delighted to hear you speak so stoutly on the subject," replied Emma, smiling; "but you do not mean to deny that there was a time — and not very distant either — when you gave me reason to understand that you did care about him?"

"Him! — never, never. Dear Miss Woodhouse, how could you so mistake me?" turning away distressed.

"Harriet," cried Emma, after a moment's pause, "what do you mean? Good Heaven! what do you mean? Mistake you! Am I to suppose then —"

She could not speak another word. Her voice was lost; and she sat down, waiting in great terror till Harriet should answer.

Harriet, who was standing at some distance and with face turned from her, did not immediately say anything; and when she did speak, it was in a voice nearly as agitated as Emma's.

"I should not have thought it possible," she began, "that you could have misunderstood me! I know we agreed never to name him; but considering how infinitely superior he is to everybody else, I should not have thought it possible that I could be supposed to mean any other person. Mr. Frank Churchill, indeed! I do not know who

would ever look at him in the company of the other. I hope I have a better taste than to think of Mr. Frank Churchill, who is like nobody by his side. And that you should have been so mistaken is amazing! I am sure, but for believing that you entirely approved and meant to encourage me in my attachment, I should have considered it at first too great a presumption almost to dare to think of him. At first, if you had not told me that more wonderful things had happened, that there had been matches of greater disparity (those were your very words), I should not have dared to give way to — I should not have thought it possible. But if you, who had always been acquainted with him — "

"Harriet," cried Emma, collecting herself resolutely, "let us understand each other now, without the possibility of further mistake. Are you speaking of — Mr. Knightley? "

"To be sure I am. I never could have an idea of anybody else, — and so I thought you knew. When we talked about him, it was as clear as possible."

"Not quite," returned Emma, with forced calmness; "for all that you then said appeared to me to relate to a different person. I could almost assert that you had named Mr. Frank Churchill. I am sure the service Mr. Frank Churchill had rendered you in protecting you from the gypsies was spoken of."

"Oh, Miss Woodhouse, how you do forget! "

"My dear Harriet, I perfectly remember the substance of what I said on the occasion. I told

you that I did not wonder at your attachment; that, considering the service he had rendered you, it was extremely natural: and you agreed to it, expressing yourself very warmly as to your sense of that service, and mentioning even what your sensations had been in seeing him come forward to your rescue. The impression of it is strong on my memory."

"Oh, dear," cried Harriet, "now I recollect what you mean; but I was thinking of something very different at the time. It was not the gypsies — it was not Mr. Frank Churchill that I meant. No!" with some elevation, "I was thinking of a much more precious circumstance, — of Mr. Knightley's coming and asking me to dance, when Mr. Elton would not stand up with me, and when there was no other partner in the room. That was the kind action; that was the noble benevolence and generosity; that was the service which made me begin to feel how superior he was to every other being upon earth."

"Good God!" cried Emma, "this has been a most unfortunate, most deplorable mistake! What is to be done?"

"You would not have encouraged me, then, if you had understood me. At least, however, I cannot be worse off than I should have been, if the other had been the person; and now — it is possible —"

She paused a few moments. Emma could not speak.

"I do not wonder, Miss Woodhouse," she resumed, "that you should feel a great difference be-

tween the two, as to me or as to anybody. You must think one five hundred million times more above me than the other. But I hope, Miss Woodhouse, that supposing — that if — strange as it may appear — But you know they were your own words, that more wonderful things had happened; matches of greater disparity had taken place than between Mr. Frank Churchill and me; and therefore it seems as if such a thing even as this may have occurred before; and if I should be so fortunate, beyond expression, as to — if Mr. Knightley should really — if he does not mind the disparity, I hope, dear Miss Woodhouse, you will not set yourself against it, and try and put difficulties in the way. But you are too good for that, I am sure."

Harriet was standing at one of the windows. Emma turned round to look at her in consternation, and hastily said, —

"Have you any idea of Mr. Knightley's returning your affection?"

"Yes," replied Harriet, modestly, but not fearfully; "I must say that I have."

Emma's eyes were instantly withdrawn; and she sat silently meditating, in a fixed attitude, for a few minutes. A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart. A mind like hers, once opening to suspicion, made rapid progress: she touched — she admitted — she acknowledged the whole truth. Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet's having some hope of a return? It darted through

her with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!

Her own conduct, as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes. She saw it all with a clearness which had never blessed her before. How improperly had she been acting by Harriet! How inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling, had been her conduct! What blindness, what madness, had led her on! It struck her with dreadful force, and she was ready to give it every bad name in the world. Some portion of respect for herself, however, in spite of all these demerits — some concern for her own appearance, and a strong sense of justice by Harriet (there would be no need of compassion to the girl who believed herself loved by Mr. Knightley — but justice required that she should not be made unhappy by any coldness now) — gave Emma the resolution to sit and endure further with calmness, with even apparent kindness. For her own advantage, indeed, it was fit that the utmost extent of Harriet's hopes should be inquired into; and Harriet had done nothing to forfeit the regard and interest which had been so voluntarily formed and maintained, or to deserve to be slighted by the person whose councils had never led her right. Rousing from reflection, therefore, and subduing her emotion, she turned to Harriet again, and in a more inviting accent renewed the conversation; for as to the subject which had first introduced it, the wonderful story of Jane Fairfax, that was quite sunk and lost. Neither of them *thought* but of Mr. Knightley and themselves.

Harriet, who had been standing in no unhappy reverie, was yet very glad to be called from it, by the now encouraging manner of such a judge and such a friend as Miss Woodhouse, and only wanted invitation to give the history of her hopes with great though trembling delight. Emma's tremblings, as she asked and as she listened, were better concealed than Harriet's, but they were not less. Her voice was not unsteady; but her mind was in all the perturbation that such a development of self, such a burst of threatening evil, such a confusion of sudden and perplexing emotions, must create. She listened with much inward suffering, but with great outward patience, to Harriet's detail. Methodical, or well arranged, or very well delivered, it could not be expected to be; but it contained, when separated from all the feebleness and tautology of the narration, a substance to sink her spirit, especially with the corroborating circumstances which her own memory brought in favor of Mr. Knightley's most improved opinion of Harriet.

Harriet had been conscious of a difference in his behavior ever since those two decisive dances. Emma knew that he had, on that occasion, found her much superior to his expectation. From that evening, or at least from the time of Miss Woodhouse's encouraging her to think of him, Harriet had begun to be sensible of his talking to her much more than she had been used to do, and of his having, indeed, quite a different manner towards her, — a manner of kindness and sweetness. Latterly she had been more and more

aware of it. When they had been all walking together, he had so often come and walked by her, and talked so very delightfully! — He seemed to want to be acquainted with her. Emma knew it to have been very much the case: she had often observed the change, to almost the same extent. Harriet repeated expressions of approbation and praise from him; and Emma felt them to be in the closest agreement with what she had known of his opinion of Harriet. He praised her for being without art or affectation; for having simple, honest, generous feelings. She knew that he saw such recommendations in Harriet; he had dwelt on them to her more than once. Much that lived in Harriet's memory, many little particulars of the notice she had received from him, — a look, a speech, a removal from one chair to another, a compliment implied, a preference inferred, — had been unnoticed, because unsuspected, by Emma. Circumstances that might swell to half an hour's relation, and contained multiplied proofs to her who had seen them, had passed undiscerned by her who now heard them; but the two latest occurrences to be mentioned — the two of strongest promise to Harriet — were not without some degree of witness from Emma herself. The first was his walking with her apart from the others in the lime walk at Donwell, where they had been walking some time before Emma came, and he had taken pains (as she was convinced) to draw her from the rest to himself; and at first he had talked to her in a more particular way than he had ever done before, — in a very particular way indeed! (Har-

riet could not recall it without a blush.) He seemed to be almost asking her whether her affections were engaged. But as soon as she (Miss Woodhouse) appeared likely to join them, he changed the subject, and began talking about farming. The second was his having sat talking with her nearly half an hour before Emma came back from her visit, the very last morning of his being at Hartfield, — though, when he first came in, he had said that he could not stay five minutes, — and his having told her, during their conversation, that though he must go to London, it was very much against his inclination that he left home at all, which was much more (as Emma felt) than he had acknowledged to her. The superior degree of confidence towards Harriet which this one article marked, gave her severe pain.

On the subject of the first of the two circumstances, she did, after a little reflection, venture the following question: "Might he not — is not it possible, that when inquiring, as you thought, into the state of your affections, he might be alluding to Mr. Martin, — he might have Mr. Martin's interest in view?" But Harriet rejected the suspicion with spirit.

"Mr. Martin! No, indeed! — There was not a hint of Mr. Martin. I hope I know better now than to care for Mr. Martin, or to be suspected of it."

When Harriet had closed her evidence, she appealed to her dear Miss Woodhouse to say whether she had not good ground for hope.

"I never should have presumed to think of it

at first," said she, "but for you. You told me to observe him carefully, and let his behavior be the rule of mine, — and so I have. But now I seem to feel that I may deserve him; and that if he does choose me, it will not be anything so very wonderful."

The bitter feelings occasioned by this speech, the many bitter feelings, made the utmost exertion necessary on Emma's side, to enable her to say in reply,—

"Harriet, I will only venture to declare that Mr. Knightley is the last man in the world who would intentionally give any woman the idea of his feeling for her more than he really does."

Harriet seemed ready to worship her friend for a sentence so satisfactory; and Emma was only saved from raptures and fondness, which at that moment would have been dreadful penance, by the sound of her father's footsteps. He was coming through the hall. Harriet was too much agitated to encounter him. "She could not compose herself — Mr. Woodhouse would be alarmed — she had better go." With most ready encouragement from her friend, therefore, she passed off through another door; and the moment she was gone, this was the spontaneous burst of Emma's feelings: "O God! that I had never seen her!"

The rest of the day, the following night, were hardly enough for her thoughts. She was bewildered amidst the confusion of all that had rushed on her within the last few hours. Every moment had brought a fresh surprise; and every surprise must be matter of humiliation to her. How to

understand it all! How to understand the deceptions she had been thus practising on herself, and living under, — the blunders, the blindness of her own head and heart! — She sat still, she walked about, she tried her own room, she tried the shrubbery, — in every place, every posture, she perceived that she had acted most weakly; that she had been imposed on by others in a most mortifying degree; that she had been imposing on herself in a degree yet more mortifying; that she was wretched, and should probably find this day but the beginning of wretchedness.

To understand, thoroughly understand her own heart, was the first endeavor. To that point went every leisure moment which her father's claims on her allowed, and every moment of involuntary absence of mind.

How long had Mr. Knightley been so dear to her as every feeling declared him now to be? When had his influence, such influence, begun? When had he succeeded to that place in her affection which Frank Churchill had once for a short period occupied? She looked back, she compared the two, — compared them as they had always stood in her estimation, from the time of the latter's becoming known to her, and as they must at any time have been compared by her, had it — oh! had it, by any blessed felicity, occurred to her to institute the comparison. She saw that there never had been a time when she did not consider Mr. Knightley as infinitely the superior, or when his regard for her had not been infinitely the most dear. She saw that in persuading herself, in

fancying, in acting to the contrary, she had been entirely under a delusion, totally ignorant of her own heart, — and, in short, that she had never really cared for Frank Churchill at all!

This was the conclusion of the first series of reflection. This was the knowledge of herself, on the first question of inquiry, which she reached; and without being long in reaching it. She was most sorrowfully indignant; ashamed of every sensation but the one revealed to her, — her affection for Mr. Knightley. Every other part of her mind was disgusting.

With insufferable vanity had she believed herself in the secret of everybody's feelings; with unpardonable arrogance proposed to arrange everybody's destiny. She was proved to have been universally mistaken; and she had not quite done nothing, — for she had done mischief. She had brought evil on Harriet, on herself, and, she too much feared, on Mr. Knightley. Were this most unequal of all connections to take place, on her must rest all the reproach of having given it a beginning; for his attachment she must believe to be produced only by a consciousness of Harriet's; and even were this not the case, he would never have known Harriet at all but for her folly.

Mr. Knightley and Harriet Smith! It was a union to distance every wonder of the kind. The attachment of Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax became commonplace, threadbare, stale in the comparison, exciting no surprise, presenting no disparity, affording nothing to be said or thought. Mr. Knightley and Harriet Smith! Such an ele-

vation on her side! Such a debasement on his! It was horrible to Emma to think how it must sink him in the general opinion, to foresee the smiles, the sneers, the merriment it would prompt at his expense; the mortification and disdain of his brother, the thousand inconveniences to himself. Could it be? No; it was impossible. And yet it was far, very far from impossible. Was it a new circumstance for a man of first-rate abilities to be captivated by very inferior powers? Was it new for one, perhaps too busy to seek, to be the prize of a girl who would seek him? Was it new for anything in this world to be unequal, inconsistent, incongruous, — or for chance and circumstance "as second causes" to direct the human fate?

Oh! had she never brought Harriet forward! Had she left her where she ought, and where he had told her she ought! Had she not, with a folly which no tongue could express, prevented her marrying the unexceptionable young man who would have made her happy and respectable in the line of life to which she ought to belong, all would have been safe; none of this dreadful sequel would have been.

How Harriet could ever have had the presumption to raise her thoughts to Mr. Knightley! — How she could dare to fancy herself the chosen of such a man till actually assured of it! But Harriet was less humble, had fewer scruples than formerly. Her inferiority, whether of mind or situation, seemed little felt. She had seemed more sensible of Mr. Elton's being to stoop in marrying her, than she now seemed of Mr. Knightley's.

Alas! was not that her own doing too? Who had been at pains to give Harriet notions of self-consequence but herself? Who but herself had taught her that she was to elevate herself if possible, and that her claims were great to a high worldly establishment? If Harriet, from being humble, were grown vain, it was her doing too.

CHAPTER XX.

Till now that she was threatened with its loss, Emma had never known how much of her happiness depended on being first with Mr. Knightley, first in interest and affection. Satisfied that it was so, and feeling it her due, she had enjoyed it without reflection; and only in the dread of being supplanted, found how inexpressibly important it had been. Long, very long, she felt she had been first; for, having no female connections of his own, there had been only Isabella whose claims could be compared with hers, and she had always known exactly how far he loved and esteemed Isabella. She had herself been first with him for many years past. She had not deserved it; she had often been negligent or perverse, slighting his advice, or even wilfully opposing him, insensible of half his merits, and quarrelling with him because he would not acknowledge her false and insolent estimate of her own, — but still, from family attachment and habit, and thorough excellence of mind, he had loved her, and watched over her from a girl, with an endeavor to improve her, and an anxiety for her doing right, which no other creature had at all shared. In spite of all her faults, she knew she was dear to him; might she not say, very dear? When the suggestions of hope, however, which must follow here, presented themselves, she could

not presume to indulge them. Harriet Smith might think herself not unworthy of being peculiarly, exclusively, passionately loved by Mr. Knightley. She could not. She could not flatter herself with any idea of blindness in his attachment to her. She had received a very recent proof of its impartiality. How shocked had he been by her behavior to Miss Bates! How directly, how strongly had he expressed himself to her on the subject! Not too strongly for the offence, but far, far too strongly to issue from any feeling softer than upright justice and clear-sighted goodwill. She had no hope, nothing to deserve the name of hope, that he could have that sort of affection for herself which was now in question; but there was a hope (at times a slight one, at times much stronger) that Harriet might have deceived herself, and be over-rating his regard for her. Wish it she must, for his sake, — be the consequence nothing to herself, but his remaining single all his life. Could she be secure of that, indeed, of his never marrying at all, she believed she should be perfectly satisfied. Let him but continue the same Mr. Knightley to her and her father, the same Mr. Knightley to all the world; let Donwell and Hartfield lose none of their precious intercourse of friendship and confidence, and her peace would be fully secured. Marriage, in fact, would not do for her. It would be incompatible with what she owed to her father, and with what she felt for him. Nothing should separate her from her father. She would not marry, even *if* she were asked by Mr. Knightley.

It must be her ardent wish that Harriet might be disappointed; and she hoped that when able to see them together again, she might at least be able to ascertain what the chances for it were. She should see them henceforward with the closest observance; and wretchedly as she had hitherto misunderstood even those she was watching, she did not know how to admit that she could be blinded here. He was expected back every day. The power of observation would be soon given, — frightfully soon it appeared when her thoughts were in one course. In the mean while she resolved against seeing Harriet. It would do neither of them good, it would do the subject no good, to be talking of it further. She was resolved not to be convinced, as long as she could doubt, and yet had no authority for opposing Harriet's confidence. To talk would be only to irritate. She wrote to her, therefore, kindly but decisively, to beg that she would not at present come to Hartfield; acknowledging it to be her conviction that all further confidential discussion of one topic had better be avoided; and hoping that if a few days were allowed to pass before they met again, except in the company of others, — she objected only to a *tête-à-tête*, — they might be able to act as if they had forgotten the conversation of yesterday. Harriet submitted, and approved, and was grateful.

This point was just arranged, when a visitor arrived to tear Emma's thoughts a little from the one subject which had engrossed them, sleeping or waking, the last twenty-four hours, — Mrs. Weston, who had been calling on her daughter-in-law elect,

and took Hartfield in her way home, almost as much in duty to Emma as in pleasure to herself, to relate all the particulars of so interesting an interview.

Mr. Weston had accompanied her to Mrs. Bates, and gone through his share of this essential attention most handsomely; but she having then induced Miss Fairfax to join her in an airing, was now returned with much more to say, and much more to say with satisfaction, than a quarter of an hour spent in Mrs. Bates's parlor, with all the incumbrance of awkward feelings, could have afforded.

A little curiosity Emma had; and she made the most of it while her friend related. Mrs. Weston had set off to pay the visit in a good deal of agitation herself; and in the first place had wished not to go at all at present, to be allowed merely to write to Miss Fairfax instead, and to defer this ceremonious call till a little time had passed, and Mr. Churchill could be reconciled to the engagement's becoming known; as, considering everything, she thought such a visit could not be paid without leading to reports: but Mr. Weston had thought differently; he was extremely anxious to show his approbation to Miss Fairfax and her family, and did not conceive that any suspicion could be excited by it; or if it were, that it would be of any consequence, —for "such things," he observed, "always got about." Emma smiled, and felt that Mr. Weston had very good reason for saying so. They had gone, in short; and very great had been the evident distress and confusion of the lady. *She* had hardly been able to speak a word, and

every look and action had shown how deeply she was suffering from consciousness. The quiet, heartfelt satisfaction of the old lady, and the rapturous delight of her daughter, who proved even too joyous to talk as usual, had been a gratifying, yet almost an affecting scene. They were both so truly respectable in their happiness, so disinterested in every sensation; thought so much of Jane, so much of everybody, and so little of themselves, — that every kindly feeling was at work for them. Miss Fairfax's recent illness had offered a fair plea for Mrs. Weston to invite her to an airing; she had drawn back and declined at first, but, on being pressed, had yielded; and in the course of their drive Mrs. Weston had by gentle encouragement, overcome so much of her embarrassment, as to bring her to converse on the important subject. Apologies for her seemingly ungracious silence in their first reception, and the warmest expressions of the gratitude she was always feeling towards herself and Mr. Weston, must necessarily open the cause; but when these effusions were put by, they had talked a good deal of the present and of the future state of the engagement. Mrs. Weston was convinced that such conversation must be the greatest relief to her companion, pent up within her own mind as everything had so long been, and was very much pleased with all that she had said on the subject.

"On the misery of what she had suffered during the concealment of so many months," continued Mrs. Weston, "she was energetic. This was one of her expressions: 'I will not say that since I

entered into the engagement I have not had some happy moments; but I can say that I have never known the blessing of one tranquil hour;' and the quivering lip, Emma, which uttered it, was an attestation that I felt at my heart."

"Poor girl!" said Emma. "She thinks herself wrong, then, for having consented to a private engagement?"

"Wrong! No one, I believe, can blame her more than she is disposed to blame herself. 'The consequence,' said she, 'has been a state of perpetual suffering to me; and so it ought. But after all the punishment that misconduct can bring, it is still not less misconduct. Pain is no expiation. I never can be blameless. I have been acting contrary to all my sense of right; and the fortunate turn that everything has taken, and the kindness I am now receiving, is what my conscience tells me ought not to be. Do not imagine, madam,' she continued, 'that I was taught wrong. Do not let any reflection fall on the principles or the care of the friends who brought me up. The error has been all my own; and I do assure you that with all the excuse that present circumstances may appear to give, I shall yet dread making the story known to Colonel Campbell.'"

"Poor girl!" said Emma again. "She loves him, then, excessively, I suppose. It must have been from attachment only that she could be led to form the engagement. Her affection must have overpowered her judgment."

"Yes, I have no doubt of her being extremely attached to him."

"I am afraid," returned Emma, sighing, "that I must often have contributed to make her unhappy."

"On your side, my love, it was very innocently done. But she probably had something of that in her thoughts, when alluding to the misunderstandings which he had given us hints of before. One natural consequence of the evil she had involved herself in," she said, "was that of making her unreasonable. The consciousness of having done amiss had exposed her to a thousand inquietudes, and made her captious and irritable to a degree that must have been — that had been — hard for him to bear. 'I did not make the allowances,' said she, 'which I ought to have done, for his temper and spirits, — his delightful spirits, and that gayety, that playfulness of disposition, which under any other circumstances would, I am sure, have been as constantly bewitching to me as they were at first.' She then began to speak of you, and of the great kindness you had shown her during her illness; and with a blush which showed me how it was all connected, desired me, whenever I had an opportunity, to thank you — I could not thank you too much — for every wish and every endeavor to do her good. She was sensible that you had never received any proper acknowledgment from herself."

"If I did not know her to be happy now," said Emma, seriously, "which, in spite of every little drawback, from her scrupulous conscience, she must be, I could not bear these thanks; for, oh, Mrs. Weston, if there were an account drawn up of the evil and the good I have done Miss Fairfax — Well,"

checking herself, and trying to be more lively, "this is all to be forgotten. You are very kind to bring me these interesting particulars: they show her to the greatest advantage. I am sure she is very good; I hope she will be very happy. It is fit that the fortune should be on his side, for I think the merit will be all on hers."

Such a conclusion could not pass unanswered by Mrs. Weston. She thought well of Frank in almost every respect; and what was more, she loved him very much, and her defence was therefore earnest. She talked with a great deal of reason, and at least equal affection; but she had too much to urge for Emma's attention: it was soon gone to Brunswick Square or to Donwell, — she forgot to attempt to listen; and when Mrs. Weston ended with, "We have not yet had the letter we are so anxious for, you know, but I hope it will soon come," she was obliged to pause before she answered, and at last obliged to answer at random, before she could at all recollect what letter it was which they were so anxious for.

"Are you well, my Emma?" was Mrs. Weston's parting question.

"Oh, perfectly. I am always well, you know. Be sure to give me intelligence of the letter as soon as possible."

Mrs. Weston's communications furnished Emma with more food for unpleasant reflection, by increasing her esteem and compassion, and her sense of past injustice towards Miss Fairfax. She bitterly regretted not having sought a closer acquaintance with her, and blushed for the envious feel-

ings which had certainly been in some measure the cause. Had she followed Mr. Knightley's known wishes in paying that attention to Miss Fairfax which was every way her due; had she tried to know her better; had she done her part towards intimacy; had she endeavored to find a friend there instead of in Harriet Smith, — she must, in all probability, have been spared from every pain which pressed on her now. Birth, abilities, and education had been equally marking one as an associate for her, to be received with gratitude; and the other — what was she? Supposing even that they had never become intimate friends; that she had never been admitted into Miss Fairfax's confidence on this important matter, — which was most probable, — still, in knowing her as she ought, and as she might, she must have been preserved from the abominable suspicions of an improper attachment to Mr. Dixon, which she had not only so foolishly fashioned and harbored herself, but had so unpardonably imparted; an idea which she greatly feared had been made a subject of material distress to the delicacy of Jane's feelings, by the levity or carelessness of Frank Churchill's. Of all the sources of evil surrounding the former, since her coming to Highbury, she was persuaded that she must herself have been the worst. She must have been a perpetual enemy. They never could have been all three together, without her having stabbed Jane Fairfax's peace in a thousand instances; and on Box Hill, perhaps, it had been the agony of a mind that would bear no more.

The evening of this day was very long and melancholy at Hartfield. The weather added what it could of gloom. A cold stormy rain set in, and nothing of July appeared but in the trees and shrubs, which the wind was despoiling, and the length of the day, which only made such cruel sights the longer visible.

The weather affected Mr. Woodhouse; and he could only be kept tolerably comfortable by almost ceaseless attention on his daughter's side, and by exertions which had never cost her half so much before. It reminded her of their first forlorn *tête-à-tête,* on the evening of Mrs. Weston's wedding-day; but Mr. Knightley had walked in then, soon after tea, and dissipated every melancholy fancy. Alas! such delightful proofs of Hartfield's attraction as those sort of visits conveyed, might shortly be over. The picture which she had then drawn of the privations of the approaching winter had proved erroneous; no friends had deserted them, no pleasures had been lost. But her present forebodings she feared would experience no similar contradiction. The prospect before her now was threatening to a degree that could not be entirely dispelled, that might not be even partially brightened. If all took place that might take place among the circle of her friends, Hartfield must be comparatively deserted; and she left to cheer her father with the spirits only of ruined happiness.

The child to be born at Randalls must be a tie there even dearer than herself; and Mrs. Weston's heart and time would be occupied by it. They *should* lose her; and probably in great measure,

her husband also. Frank Churchill would return among them no more; and Miss Fairfax, it was reasonable to suppose, would soon cease to belong to Highbury. They would be married, and settled either at or near Enscombe. All that were good would be withdrawn, and if to these losses the loss of Donwell were to be added, what would remain of cheerful or rational society within their reach? Mr. Knightley to be no longer coming there for his evening comfort! No longer walking in at all hours, as if ever willing to change his own home for theirs! How was it to be endured? And if he were to be lost to them for Harriet's sake; if he were to be thought of hereafter as finding in Harriet's society all that he wanted; if Harriet were to be the chosen, the first, the dearest, the friend, the wife to whom he looked for all the best blessings of existence, — what could be increasing Emma's wretchedness but the reflection never far distant from her mind, that it had been all her own work?

When it came to such a pitch as this, she was not able to refrain from a start or a heavy sigh, or even from walking about the room for a few seconds; and the only source whence anything like consolation or composure could be drawn was in the resolution of her own better conduct, and the hope that however inferior in spirit and gayety might be the following and every future winter of her life to the past, it would yet find her more rational, more acquainted with herself, and leave her less to regret when it were gone.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE weather continued much the same all the following morning, and the same loneliness and the same melancholy seemed to reign at Hartfield; but in the afternoon it cleared, — the wind changed into a softer quarter; the clouds were carried off; the sun appeared; it was summer again. With all the eagerness which such a transition gives, Emma resolved to be out of doors as soon as possible. Never had the exquisite sight, smell, sensation of nature, tranquil, warm, and brilliant after a storm, been more attractive to her. She longed for the serenity they might gradually introduce; and on Mr. Perry's coming in soon after dinner with a disengaged hour to give her father, she lost no time in hurrying into the shrubbery. There, with spirits freshened and thoughts a little relieved, she had taken a few turns when she saw Mr. Knightley passing through the garden door and coming towards her. It was the first intimation of his being returned from London. She had been thinking of him the moment before as unquestionably sixteen miles distant. There was time only for the quickest arrangement of mind. She must be collected and calm. In half a minute they were together. The "How d' ye do's" were quiet and constrained on each side. She asked

after their mutual friends. They were all well. When had he left them? Only that morning. He must have had a wet ride. Yes! He meant to walk with her, she found. "He had just looked into the dining-room, and as he was not wanted there preferred being out of doors." She thought he neither looked nor spoke cheerfully; and the first possible cause for it, suggested by her fears, was that he had perhaps been communicating his plans to his brother, and was pained by the manner in which they had been received.

They walked together. He was silent. She thought he was often looking at her, and trying for a fuller view of her face than it suited her to give. And this belief produced another dread. Perhaps he wanted to speak to her of his attachment to Harriet; he might be watching for encouragement to begin. She did not, could not, feel equal to lead the way to any such subject. He must do it all himself. Yet she could not bear this silence. With him it was most unnatural. She considered, resolved, and trying to smile began, —

"You have some news to hear, now you are come back, that will rather surprise you."

"Have I?" said he, quietly, and looking at her; "of what nature?"

"Oh, the best nature in the world, — a wedding."

After waiting a moment as if to be sure she intended to say no more, he replied, —

"If you mean Miss Fairfax and Frank Churchill, I have heard that already."

"How is it possible?" cried Emma, turning her glowing cheeks towards him; for while she

spoke it occurred to her that he might have called at Mrs. Goddard's in his way.

"I had a few lines on parish business from Mr. Weston this morning, and at the end of them he gave me a brief account of what had happened."

Emma was quite relieved, and could presently say, with a little more composure, —

"You probably have been less surprised than any of us, for you have had your suspicions. I have not forgotten that you once tried to give me a caution. I wish I had attended to it; but," with a sinking voice and a heavy sigh, "I seem to have been doomed to blindness."

For a moment or two nothing was said, and she was unsuspicious of having excited any particular interest till she found her arm drawn within his and pressed against his heart, and heard him thus saying in a tone of great sensibility, speaking low, —

"Time, my dearest Emma, time will heal the wound. Your own excellent sense, your exertions for your father's sake, — I know you will not allow yourself — " Her arm was pressed again as he added, in a more broken and subdued accent, "The feelings of the warmest friendship — indignation — abominable scoundrel!" And in a louder, steadier tone he concluded with: "He will soon be gone. They will soon be in Yorkshire. I am sorry for her. She deserves a better fate."

Emma understood him; and as soon as she could recover from the flutter of pleasure excited by such tender consideration, replied, —

"You are very kind, but you are mistaken, and

I must set you right. I am not in want of that sort of compassion. My blindness to what was going on led me to act by them in a way that I must always be ashamed of, and I was very foolishly tempted to say and do many things which may well lay me open to unpleasant conjectures, but I have no other reason to regret that I was not in the secret earlier."

"Emma," cried he, looking eagerly at her, "are you, indeed" — but checking himself — "No, no, I understand you — forgive me — I am pleased that you can say even so much. He is no object of regret, indeed! and it will not be very long, I hope, before that becomes the acknowledgment of more than your reason. Fortunate that your affections were not further entangled! I could never, I confess, from your manners assure myself as to the degree of what you felt, — I could only be certain that there was a preference, and a preference which I never believed him to deserve. He is a disgrace to the name of man. And is he to be rewarded with that sweet young woman? Jane, Jane, you will be a miserable creature."

"Mr. Knightley," said Emma, trying to be lively, but really confused, "I am in a very extraordinary situation. I cannot let you continue in your error; and yet, perhaps, since my manners gave such an impression, I have as much reason to be ashamed of confessing that I never have been at all attached to the person we are speaking of, as it might be natural for a woman to feel in confessing exactly the reverse. But I never have."

He listened in perfect silence. She wished him to speak, but he would not. She supposed she must say more before she were entitled to his clemency; but it was a hard case to be obliged still to lower herself in his opinion. She went on, however, —

"I have very little to say for my own conduct. I was tempted by his attentions, and allowed myself to appear pleased. An old story, probably, — a common case, — and no more than has happened to hundreds of my sex before; and yet it may not be the more excusable in one who sets up as I do for understanding. Many circumstances assisted the temptation. He was the son of Mr. Weston, he was continually here, I always found him very pleasant, and in short, — for," with a sigh, "let me swell out the causes ever so ingeniously, they all centre in this at last, — my vanity was flattered and I allowed his attentions. Latterly, however, for some time indeed, I have had no idea of their meaning anything. I thought them a habit, a trick, nothing that called for seriousness on my side. He has imposed on me, but he has not injured me. I have never been attached to him. And now I can tolerably comprehend his behavior. He never wished to attach me. It was merely a blind to conceal his real situation with another. It was his object to blind all about him; and no one, I am sure, could be more effectually blinded than myself — except that I was not blinded — that it was my good fortune — that, in short, I was somehow or other safe from him."

She had hoped for an answer here, — for a few

words to say that her conduct was at least intelligible; but he was silent, and, as far as she could judge, deep in thought. At last, and tolerably in his usual tone, he said, —

"I have never had a high opinion of Frank Churchill. I can suppose, however, that I may have underrated him. My acquaintance with him has been but trifling. And even if I have not underrated him hitherto, he may yet turn out well. With such a woman he has a chance. I have no motive for wishing him ill, — and for her sake, whose happiness will be involved in his good character and conduct, I shall certainly wish him well."

"I have no doubt of their being happy together," said Emma; "I believe them to be very mutually and very sincerely attached."

"He is a most fortunate man," returned Mr. Knightley, with energy. "So early in life — at three-and-twenty — a period when, if a man chooses a wife, he generally chooses ill. At three-and-twenty to have drawn such a prize! What years of felicity that man, in all human calculation, has before him! Assured of the love of such a woman, — the disinterested love, for Jane Fairfax's character vouches for her disinterestedness; everything in his favor, — equality of situation — I mean, as far as regards society, and all the habits and manners that are important; equality in every point but one, — and that one, since the purity of her heart is not to be doubted, such as must increase his felicity, for it will be his to bestow the only

advantages she wants. A man would always wish to give a woman a better home than the one he takes her from; and he who can do it, where there is no doubt of her regard, must, I think, be the happiest of mortals. Frank Churchill is, indeed, the favorite of fortune. Everything turns out for his good. He meets with a young woman at a watering-place, gains her affection, cannot even weary her by negligent treatment; and had he and all his family sought round the world for a perfect wife for him, they could not have found her superior. His aunt is in the way. His aunt dies. He has only to speak. His friends are eager to promote his happiness. He has used everybody ill, and they are all delighted to forgive him. He is a fortunate man, indeed!"

"You speak as if you envied him."

"And I do envy him, Emma. In one respect he is the object of my envy."

Emma could say no more. They seemed to be within half a sentence of Harriet; and her immediate feeling was to avert the subject, if possible. She made her plan; she would speak of something totally different, — the children in Brunswick Square; and she only waited for breath to begin, when Mr. Knightley startled her by saying, —

"You will not ask me what is the point of envy. You are determined, I see, to have no curiosity. You are wise — but I cannot be wise. Emma, I must tell what you will not ask, though I may wish it unsaid the next moment."

"Oh, then, don't speak it, don't speak it!" she eagerly cried. "Take a little time, consider, do not commit yourself."

"Thank you," said he, in an accent of deep mortification; and not another syllable followed.

Emma could not bear to give him pain. He was wishing to confide in her, perhaps to consult her; cost her what it would, she would listen. She might assist his resolution, or reconcile him to it; she might give just praise to Harriet, or by representing to him his own independence, relieve him from that state of indecision which must be more intolerable than any alternative to such a mind as his. They had reached the house.

"You are going in, I suppose," said he.

"No," replied Emma, quite confirmed by the depressed manner in which he still spoke, "I should like to take another turn. Mr. Perry is not gone." And after proceeding a few steps, she added: "I stopped you ungraciously just now, Mr. Knightley, and, I am afraid, gave you pain. But if you have any wish to speak openly to me as a friend, or to ask my opinion of anything that you may have in contemplation —as a friend, indeed, you may command me. I will hear whatever you like. I will tell you exactly what I think."

"As a friend!" repeated Mr. Knightley. "Emma, that I fear is a word— No, I have no wish. Stay, yes, why should I hesitate? I have gone too far already for concealment. Emma, I accept your offer, extraordinary as it

may seem, I accept it, and refer myself to you as a friend. Tell me, then, have I no chance of ever succeeding?"

He stopped in his earnestness to look the question, and the expression of his eyes overpowered her.

"My dearest Emma," said he, — "for dearest you will always be, whatever the event of this hour's conversation, — my dearest, most beloved Emma, tell me at once. Say 'No,' if it is to be said." She could really say nothing. "You are silent," he cried, with great animation, "absolutely silent! At present I ask no more."

Emma was almost ready to sink under the agitation of this moment. The dread of being awakened from the happiest dream was perhaps the most prominent feeling.

"I cannot make speeches, Emma," he soon resumed, and in a tone of such sincere, decided, intelligible tenderness as was tolerably convincing. "If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more. But you know what I am. You hear nothing but truth from me. I have blamed you and lectured you, and you have borne it as no other woman in England would have borne it. Bear with the truths I would tell you now, dearest Emma, as well as you have borne with them. The manner, perhaps, may have as little to recommend them. God knows, I have been a very indifferent lover. But you understand me. Yes, you see, you understand my feelings, and will return them if you can.

At present, I ask only to hear, once to hear your voice."

While he spoke, Emma's mind was most busy, and with all the wonderful velocity of thought, had been able — and yet without losing a word — to catch and comprehend the exact truth of the whole; to see that Harriet's hopes had been entirely groundless, a mistake, a delusion, as complete a delusion as any of her own, — that Harriet was nothing; that she was everything herself; that what she had been saying relative to Harriet had been all taken as the language of her own feelings; and that her agitation, her doubts, her reluctance, her discouragement, had been all received as discouragement from herself. And not only was there time for these convictions, with all their glow of attendant happiness; there was time also to rejoice that Harriet's secret had not escaped her, and to resolve that it need not and should not. It was all the service she could now render her poor friend; for as to any of that heroism of sentiment which might have prompted her to entreat him to transfer his affection from herself to Harriet, as infinitely the most worthy of the two — or even the more simple sublimity of resolving to refuse him at once and forever, without vouchsafing any motive, because he could not marry them both, Emma had it not. She felt for Harriet with pain and with contrition; but no flight of generosity run mad, opposing all that could be probable or reasonable, entered her brain. She had led her friend astray, and it would be a reproach to her forever; but her

judgment was as strong as her feelings, and as strong as it had ever been before, in reprobating any such alliance for him, as most unequal and degrading. Her way was clear, though not quite smooth. She spoke then, on being so entreated. What did she say? Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does. She said enough to show there need not be despair, and to invite him to say more himself. He had despaired at one period; he had received such an injunction to caution and silence as for the time crushed every hope, — she had begun by refusing to hear him. The change had perhaps been somewhat sudden; her proposal of taking another turn, her renewing the conversation which she had just put an end to, might be a little extraordinary. She felt its inconsistency; but Mr. Knightley was so obliging as to put up with it, and seek no further explanation.

Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised or a little mistaken; but where, as in this case, though the conduct is mistaken, the feelings are not, it may not be very material. Mr. Knightley could not impute to Emma a more relenting heart than she possessed, or a heart more disposed to accept of his.

He had, in fact, been wholly unsuspicious of his own influence. He had followed her into the shrubbery with no idea of trying it. He had come, in his anxiety to see how she bore Frank Churchill's engagement, with no selfish

view, no view at all, but of endeavoring, if she allowed him an opening, to soothe or to counsel her. The rest had been the work of the moment, the immediate effect of what he heard, on his feelings. The delightful assurance of her total indifference towards Frank Churchill, of her having a heart completely disengaged from him, had given birth to the hope that in time he might gain her affection himself; but it had been no present hope, — he had only, in the momentary conquest of eagerness over judgment, aspired to be told that she did not forbid his attempt to attach her. The superior hopes which gradually opened were so much the more enchanting. The affection which he had been asking to be allowed to create if he could, was already his. Within half an hour he had passed from a thoroughly distressed state of mind to something so like perfect happiness that it could bear no other name.

Her change was equal. This one half-hour had given to each the same precious certainty of being beloved, had cleared from each the same degree of ignorance, jealousy, or distrust. On his side, there had been a long-standing jealousy, old as the arrival, or even the expectation, of Frank Churchill. He had been in love with Emma, and jealous of Frank Churchill, from about the same period, one sentiment having probably enlightened him as to the other. It was his jealousy of Frank Churchill that had taken him from the country. The Box Hill party had decided him on going away. He would save himself from witnessing again such

permitted, encouraged attentions. He had gone to learn to be indifferent. But he had gone to a wrong place. There was too much domestic happiness in his brother's house; women wore too amiable a form in it; Isabella was too much like Emma, — differing only in those striking inferiorities which always brought the other in brilliancy before him, for much to have been done, even had his time been longer. He had stayed on, however, vigorously, day after day — till this very morning's post had conveyed the history of Jane Fairfax. Then, with the gladness which must be felt, nay, which he did not scruple to feel, having never believed Frank Churchill to be at all deserving Emma, was there so much fond solicitude, so much keen anxiety for her, that he could stay no longer. He had ridden home through the rain, and had walked up directly after dinner, to see how this sweetest and best of all creatures, faultless in spite of all her faults, bore the discovery.

He had found her agitated and low. Frank Churchill was a villain. He heard her declare that she had never loved him. Frank Churchill's character was not desperate. She was his own Emma, by hand and word, when they returned into the house; and if he could have thought of Frank Churchill then, he might have deemed him a very good sort of fellow.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHAT totally different feelings did Emma take back into the house from what she had brought out! She had then been only daring to hope for a little respite of suffering; she was now in an exquisite flutter of happiness, and such happiness, moreover, as she believed must still be greater when the flutter should have passed away.

They sat down to tea, — the same party round the same table. How often it had been collected; and how often had her eyes fallen on the same shrubs in the lawn, and observed the same beautiful effect of the western sun! But never in such a state of spirits, never in anything like it; and it was with difficulty that she could summon enough of her usual self to be the attentive lady of the house, or even the attentive daughter.

Poor Mr. Woodhouse little suspected what was plotting against him in the breast of that man whom he was so cordially welcoming, and so anxiously hoping might not have taken cold from his ride. Could he have seen the heart, he would have cared very little for the lungs; but without the most distant imagination of the impending evil, without the slightest perception of anything extraordinary, in the looks or ways of either, he repeated to them very comfortably all the articles of

news he had received from Mr. Perry, and talked on with much self-contentment, totally unsuspicious of what they could have told him in return.

As long as Mr. Knightley remained with them, Emma's fever continued; but when he was gone, she began to be a little tranquillized and subdued, and in the course of the sleepless night, which was the tax for such an evening, she found one or two such very serious points to consider as made her feel that even her happiness must have some alloy. Her father — and Harriet. She could not be alone without feeling the full weight of their separate claims; and how to guard the comfort of both to the utmost, was the question. With respect to her father, it was a question soon answered. She hardly knew yet what Mr. Knightley would ask; but a very short parley with her own heart produced the most solemn resolution of never quitting her father. She even wept over the idea of it, as a sin of thought. While he lived, it must be only an engagement; but she flattered herself that if divested of the danger of drawing her away, it might become an increase of comfort to him. How to do her best by Harriet was of more difficult decision; how to spare her from any unnecessary pain; how to make her any possible atonement; how to appear least her enemy. On these subjects her perplexity and distress were very great, and her mind had to pass again and again through every bitter reproach and sorrowful regret that had ever surrounded it. She could only resolve at last that she would still avoid a meeting with her, and communicate all that need be told

by letter; that it would be inexpressibly desirable to have her removed just now for a time from Highbury, and — indulging in one scheme more — nearly resolve that it might be practicable to get an invitation for her to Brunswick Square. Isabella had been pleased with Harriet; and a few weeks spent in London must give her some amusement. She did not think it in Harriet's nature to escape being benefited by novelty and variety, by the streets, the shops, and the children. At any rate, it would be a proof of attention and kindness in herself, from whom everything was due; a separation for the present; an averting of the evil day when they must all be together again.

She rose early and wrote her letter to Harriet, — an employment which left her so very serious, so nearly sad, that Mr. Knightley, in walking up to Hartfield to breakfast, did not arrive at all too soon; and half an hour stolen afterwards to go over the same ground again with him, literally and figuratively, was quite necessary to reinstate her in a proper share of the happiness of the evening before.

He had not left her long, by no means long enough for her to have the slightest inclination for thinking of anybody else, when a letter was brought her from Randalls, — a very thick letter; she guessed what it must contain, and deprecated the necessity of reading it. She was now in perfect charity with Frank Churchill; she wanted no explanations, she wanted only to have her thoughts to herself; and as for understanding anything he wrote she was sure she was incapable of it. It

must be waded through, however. She opened the packet; it was too surely so, — a note from Mrs. Weston to herself ushered in the letter from Frank to Mrs. Weston.

I have the greatest pleasure, my dear Emma, in forwarding to you the enclosed. I know what thorough justice you will do it, and have scarcely a doubt of its happy effect. I think we shall never materially disagree about the writer again; but I will not delay you by a long preface. We are quite well. This letter has been the cure of all the little nervousness I have been feeling lately. I did not quite like your looks on Tuesday, but it was an ungenial morning; and though you will never own being affected by weather, I think everybody feels a northeast wind. I felt for your dear father very much in the storm of Tuesday afternoon and yesterday morning, but had the comfort of hearing last night, by Mr. Perry, that it had not made him ill.

Yours ever, A. W.

[*To Mrs. Weston.*]

WINDSOR, — July.

MY DEAR MADAM, — If I made myself intelligible yesterday, this letter will be expected; but expected or not, I know it will be read with candor and indulgence. You are all goodness, and I believe there will be need of even all your goodness to allow for some parts of my past conduct. But I have been forgiven by one who had still more to resent. My courage rises while I write. It is very difficult for the prosperous to be humble. I have already met with such success in two applications for pardon, that I may be in danger of thinking myself too sure of yours, and of those among your friends who have had any ground of offence. You must all endeavor *to* comprehend the exact nature of my situation when I

first arrived at Randalls; you must consider me as having a secret which was to be kept at all hazards. This was the fact. My right to place myself in a situation requiring such concealment is another question. I shall not discuss it here. For my temptation to think it a right, I refer every caviller to a brick house, sashed windows below, and casements above, in Highbury. I dared not address her openly; my difficulties in the then state of Enscombe must be too well known to require definition; and I was fortunate enough to prevail, before we parted at Weymouth, and to induce the most upright female mind in the creation to stoop in charity to a secret engagement. Had she refused, I should have gone mad. But you will be ready to say, What was your hope in doing this? What did you look forward to? To anything, everything, — to time, chance, circumstance, slow effects, sudden bursts, perseverance and weariness, health and sickness. Every possibility of good was before me, and the first of blessings secured, in obtaining her promises of faith and correspondence. If you need further explanation, I have the honor, my dear madam, of being your husband's son, and the advantage of inheriting a disposition to hope for good, which no inheritance of houses or lands can ever equal the value of. See me, then, under these circumstances, arriving on my first visit to Randalls; and here I am conscious of wrong, for that visit might have been sooner paid. You will look back, and see that I did not come till Miss Fairfax was in Highbury; and as you were the person slighted, you will forgive me instantly: but I must work on my father's compassion by reminding him that so long as I absented myself from his house, so long I lost the blessing of knowing you. My behavior during the very happy fortnight which I spent with you did not, I hope, lay me open to reprehension, excepting on one point. And now I come to the principal, the only important part of my conduct, while belonging to you, which excites my own anxiety, or

requires very solicitous explanation. With the greatest respect and the warmest friendship do I mention Miss Woodhouse; my father, perhaps, will think I ought to add, with the deepest humiliation. A few words which dropped from him yesterday spoke his opinion, and some censure I acknowledge myself liable to. My behavior to Miss Woodhouse indicated, I believe, more than it ought. In order to assist a concealment so essential to me, I was led on to make more than an allowable use of the sort of intimacy into which we were immediately thrown. I cannot deny that Miss Woodhouse was my ostensible object; but I am sure you will believe the declaration, that had I not been convinced of her indifference, I would not have been induced by any selfish views to go on. Amiable and delightful as Miss Woodhouse is, she never gave me the idea of a young woman likely to be attached; and that she was perfectly free from any tendency to being attached to me, was as much my conviction as my wish. She received my attentions with an easy, friendly, good-humored playfulness, which exactly suited me. We seemed to understand each other. From our relative situation, those attentions were her due, and were felt to be so. Whether Miss Woodhouse began really to understand me before the expiration of that fortnight, I cannot say: when I called to take leave of her, I remember that I was within a moment of confessing the truth, and I then fancied she was not without suspicion; but I have no doubt of her having since detected me, — at least, in some degree. She may not have surmised the whole, but her quickness must have penetrated a part. I cannot doubt it. You will find, whenever the subject becomes freed from its present restraints, that it did not take her wholly by surprise. She frequently gave me hints of it. I remember her telling me at the ball that I owed Mrs. Elton gratitude for her attentions to Miss Fairfax. I hope this history of my conduct towards her will be admitted by you and my

father as great extenuation of what you saw amiss. While you considered me as having sinned against Emma Woodhouse, I could deserve nothing from either. Acquit me here, and procure for me, when it is allowable, the acquittal and good wishes of that said Emma Woodhouse, whom I regard with so much brotherly affection as to long to have her as deeply and as happily in love as myself. Whatever strange things I said or did during that fortnight, you have now a key to. My heart was in Highbury, and my business was to get my body thither as often as might be, and with the least suspicion. If you remember any queerness, set them all to the right account. Of the piano-forte so much talked of, I feel it only necessary to say that its being ordered was absolutely unknown to Miss F——, who would never have allowed me to send it, had any choice been given her. The delicacy of her mind throughout the whole engagement, my dear madam, is much beyond my power of doing justice to. You will soon, I earnestly hope, know her thoroughly yourself. No description can describe her. She must tell you herself what she is; yet not by word, for never was there a human creature who would so designedly suppress her own merit. Since I began this letter, which will be longer than I foresaw, I have heard from her. She gives a good account of her own health; but as she never complains, I dare not depend. I want to have your opinion of her looks. I know you will soon call on her; she is living in dread of the visit. Perhaps it is paid already. Let me hear from you without delay! I am impatient for a thousand particulars. Remember how few minutes I was at Randalls, and in how bewildered, how mad a state: and I am not much better yet; still insane either from happiness or misery. When I think of the kindness and favor I have met with, of her excellence and patience, and my uncle's generosity, I am mad with joy: but when I recollect all the uneasiness I occasioned her, and how little I deserve to

be forgiven, I am mad with anger. If I could but see her again! But I must not propose it yet: my uncle has been too good for me to encroach. I must still add to this long letter. You have not heard all that you ought to hear. I could not give any connected detail yesterday; but the suddenness and, in one light, the unseasonableness with which the affair burst out, needs explanation; for though the event of the 26th ult., as you will conclude, immediately opened to me the happiest prospects, I should not have presumed on such early measures, but from the very particular circumstances which left me not an hour to lose. I should myself have shrunk from anything so hasty, and she would have felt every scruple of mine with multiplied strength and refinement: but I had no choice. The hasty engagement she had entered into with that woman —

Here, my dear madam, I was obliged to leave off abruptly to recollect and compose myself. I have been walking over the country, and am now, I hope, rational enough to make the rest of my letter what it ought to be. It is, in fact, a most mortifying retrospect for me. I behaved shamefully. And here I can admit that my manners to Miss W., in being unpleasant to Miss F., were highly blamable. She disapproved them, which ought to have been enough. My plea of concealing the truth she did not think sufficient. She was displeased; I thought unreasonably so: I thought her on a thousand occasions unnecessarily scrupulous and cautious; I thought her even cold. But she was always right. If I had followed her judgment, and subdued my spirits to the level of what she deemed proper, I should have escaped the greatest unhappiness I have ever known. We quarrelled. Do you remember the morning spent at Donwell? There every little dissatisfaction that had occurred before came to a crisis. I was late; I met her walking home by herself, and wanted to walk with her, but she would not suffer it. She absolutely refused to

allow me, which I then thought most unreasonable. Now, however, I see nothing in it but a very natural and consistent degree of discretion. While I, to blind the world to our engagement, was behaving one hour with objectionable particularity to another woman, was she to be consenting the next to a proposal which might have made every previous caution useless? Had we been met walking together between Donwell and Highbury, the truth must have been suspected. I was mad enough, however, to resent. I doubted her affection. I doubted it more the next day on Box Hill; when, provoked by such conduct on my side, such shameful, insolent neglect of her, and such apparent devotion to Miss W., as it would have been impossible for any woman of sense to endure, she spoke her resentment in a form of words perfectly intelligible to me. In short, my dear madam, it was a quarrel blameless on her side, abominable on mine; and I returned the same evening to Richmond, though I might have stayed with you till the next morning, merely because I would be as angry with her as possible. Even then I was not such a fool as not to mean to be reconciled in time; but I was the injured person, injured by her coldness, and I went away determined that she should make the first advances. I shall always congratulate myself that you were not of the Box Hill party. Had you witnessed my behavior there, I can hardly suppose you would ever have thought well of me again. Its effect upon her appears in the immediate resolution it produced: as soon as she found I was really gone from Randalls, she closed with the offer of that officious Mrs. Elton; the whole system of whose treatment of her, by the by, has ever filled me with indignation and hatred. I must not quarrel with the spirit of forbearance which has been so richly extended towards myself; but otherwise I should loudly protest against the share of it which that woman has known. "Jane," indeed! You will observe that I have not yet indulged

myself in calling her by that name, even to you. Think, then, what I must have endured in hearing it bandied between the Eltons with all the vulgarity of needless repetition, and all the insolence of imaginary superiority. Have patience with me, I shall soon have done. She closed with this offer, resolving to break with me entirely, and wrote the next day to tell me that we never were to meet again. She felt the engagement to be a source of repentance and misery to each: she dissolved it. This letter reached me on the very morning of my poor aunt's death. I answered it within an hour; but from the confusion of my mind, and the multiplicity of business falling on me at once, my answer, instead of being sent with all the many other letters of that day, was locked up in my writing-desk; and I, trusting that I had written enough, though but a few lines, to satisfy her, remained without any uneasiness. I was rather disappointed that I did not hear from her again speedily; but I made excuses for her, and was too busy, and — may I add? — too cheerful in my views to be captious. We removed to Windsor; and two days afterwards I received a parcel from her — my own letters all returned! — and a few lines at the same time by the post, stating her extreme surprise at not having had the smallest reply to her last; and adding that as silence on such a point could not be misconstrued, and as it must be equally desirable to both to have every subordinate arrangement concluded as soon as possible, she now sent me, by a safe conveyance, all my letters, and requested that if I could not directly command hers so as to send them to Highbury within a week, I would forward them after that period to her at ——; in short, the full direction to Mr. Smallridge's, near Bristol, stared me in the face. I knew the name, the place, I knew all about it, and instantly saw what she had been doing. It was perfectly accordant with that resolution of character which I knew her to possess; and the secrecy she had maintained as to any such design in

her former letter, was equally descriptive of its anxious delicacy. For the world would not she have seemed to threaten me. Imagine the shock; imagine how till I had actually detected my own blunder I raved at the blunders of the post. What was to be done? One thing only. I must speak to my uncle. Without his sanction I could not hope to be listened to again. I spoke; circumstances were in my favor; the late event had softened away his pride, and he was, earlier than I could have anticipated, wholly reconciled and complying; and could say at last, poor man! with a deep sigh, that he wished I might find as much happiness in the marriage state as he had done. I felt that it would be of a different sort. Are you disposed to pity me for what I must have suffered in opening the cause to him, for my suspense while all was at stake? No; do not pity me till I reached Highbury and saw how ill I had made her. Do not pity me till I saw her wan, sick looks. I reached Highbury at the time of day when, from my knowledge of their late breakfast-hour, I was certain of a good chance of finding her alone. I was not disappointed; and at last I was not disappointed either in the object of my journey. A great deal of very reasonable, very just displeasure I had to persuade away. But it is done; we are reconciled, dearer, much dearer than ever, and no moment's uneasiness can ever occur between us again. Now, my dear madam, I will release you; but I could not conclude before. A thousand and a thousand thanks for all the kindness you have ever shown me, and ten thousand for the attentions your heart will dictate towards her. If you think me in a way to be happier than I deserve, I am quite of your opinion. Miss W. calls me the child of good fortune. I hope she is right. In one respect my good fortune is undoubted, — that of being able to subscribe myself

Your obliged and affectionate son,

F. C. Weston Churchill.

CHAPTER XXIII.

This letter must make its way to Emma's feelings. She was obliged, in spite of her previous determination to the contrary, to do it all the justice that Mrs. Weston foretold. As soon as she came to her own name, it was irresistible, — every line relating to herself was interesting, and almost every line agreeable; and when this charm ceased, the subject could still maintain itself, by the natural return of her former regard for the writer, and the very strong attraction which any picture of love must have for her at that moment. She never stopped till she had gone through the whole; and though it was impossible not to feel that he had been wrong, yet he had been less wrong than she had supposed; and he had suffered and was very sorry; and he was so grateful to Mrs. Weston, and so much in love with Miss Fairfax, and she was so happy herself, that there was no being severe; and could he have entered the room, she must have shaken hands with him as heartily as ever.

She thought so well of the letter that when Mr. Knightley came again, she desired him to read it. She was sure of Mrs. Weston's wishing it to be communicated; especially to one who, like Mr. Knightley, had seen so much to blame in his conduct.

"I shall be very glad to look it over," said he, "but it seems long. I will take it home with me at night."

But that would not do. Mr. Weston was to call in the evening, and she must return it by him.

"I would rather be talking to you," he replied; "but as it seems a matter of justice, it shall be done."

He began; stopping, however, almost directly to say, "Had I been offered the sight of one of this gentleman's letters to his mother-in-law a few months ago, Emma, it would not have been taken with such indifference."

He proceeded a little farther, reading to himself; and then, with a smile, observed: "Humph! — a fine complimentary opening; but it is his way. One man's style must not be the rule of another's. We will not be severe."

"It will be natural for me," he added shortly afterwards, "to speak my opinion aloud as I read. By doing it, I shall feel that I am near you. It will not be so great a loss of time; but if you dislike it — "

"Not at all. I should wish it."

Mr. Knightley returned to his reading with greater alacrity.

"He trifles here," said he, "as to the temptation. He knows he is wrong, and has nothing rational to urge. Bad. He ought not to have formed the engagement. 'His father's disposition;' — he is unjust, however, to his father. Mr. Weston's sanguine temper was a blessing on all his upright and honorable exertions; but Mr. Weston

earned every present comfort before he endeavored to gain it. Very true; he did not come till Miss Fairfax was here."

"And I have not forgotten," said Emma, "how sure you were that he might have come sooner if he would. You pass it over very handsomely; but you were perfectly right."

"I was not quite impartial in my judgment, Emma; but yet, I think, had you not been in the case, I should still have distrusted him."

When he came to Miss Woodhouse, he was obliged to read the whole of it aloud, — all that related to her, with a smile, a look, a shake of the head, a word or two of assent or disapprobation or merely of love, as the subject required; concluding, however, seriously, and after steady reflection, thus, —

"Very bad — though it might have been worse. Playing a most dangerous game. Too much indebted to the event for his acquittal. No judge of his own manners by you. Always deceived, in fact, by his own wishes, and regardless of little besides his own convenience. Fancying you to have fathomed his secret! Natural enough! his own mind full of intrigue, that he should suspect it in others. Mystery! — finesse — how they pervert the understanding! My Emma, does not everything serve to prove more and more the beauty of truth and sincerity in all our dealings with each other?"

Emma agreed to it, and with a blush of sensibility on Harriet's account, which she could not give any sincere explanation of.

"You had better go on," said she.

He did so, but very soon stopped again to say: "The piano-forte! Ah! — that was the act of a very, very young man, one too young to consider whether the inconvenience of it might not very much exceed the pleasure. A boyish scheme, indeed! I cannot comprehend a man's wishing to give a woman any proof of affection which he knows she would rather dispense with; and he did know that she would have prevented the instrument's coming if she could."

After this, he made some progress without any pause. Frank Churchill's confession of having behaved shamefully was the first thing to call for more than a word in passing.

"I perfectly agree with you, sir," was then his remark. "You did behave very shamefully. You never wrote a truer line." And having gone through what immediately followed of the basis of their disagreement, and his persisting to act in direct opposition to Jane Fairfax's sense of right, he made a fuller pause to say, "This is very bad. He had induced her to place herself for his sake in a situation of extreme difficulty and uneasiness, and it should have been his first object to prevent her from suffering unnecessarily. She must have had much more to contend with in carrying on the correspondence than he could. He should have respected even unreasonable scruples, had there been such; but hers were all reasonable. We must look to her one fault, and remember that she had done a wrong thing in consenting to the engagement, to bear that she should have been in such a state of punishment."

Emma knew that he was now getting to the Box Hill party, and grew uncomfortable. Her own behavior had been so very improper! She was deeply ashamed, and a little afraid of his next look. It was all read, however, steadily, attentively, and without the smallest remark; and excepting one momentary glance at her, instantly withdrawn, in the fear of giving pain, no remembrance of Box Hill seemed to exist.

"There is no saying much for the delicacy of our good friends the Eltons," was his next observation. "His feelings are natural. What! actually resolve to break with him entirely! She felt the engagement to be a source of repentance and misery to each, — she dissolved it. What a view this gives of her sense of his behavior! Well, he must be a most extraordinary —"

"Nay, nay, read on. You will find how very much he suffers."

"I hope he does," replied Mr. Knightley, coolly, and resuming the letter. "Smallridge!" What does this mean? What is all this?"

"She had engaged to go as governess to Mrs. Smallridge's children, — a dear friend of Mrs. Elton's, a neighbor of Maple Grove; and, by the by, I wonder how Mrs. Elton bears the disappointment."

"Say nothing, my dear Emma, while you oblige me to read, — not even of Mrs. Elton. Only one page more. I shall soon have done. What a letter the man writes!"

"I wish you would read it with a kinder spirit towards him."

"Well, there is feeling here. He does seem to have suffered in finding her ill. Certainly, I can have no doubt of his being fond of her. 'Dearer, much dearer than ever.' I hope he may long continue to feel all the value of such a reconciliation. He is a very liberal thanker, with his thousands and tens of thousands. 'Happier than I deserve.' Come, he knows himself there. 'Miss Woodhouse calls me the child of good fortune.' Those were Miss Woodhouse's words, were they? And a fine ending — and there is a letter. 'The child of good fortune!' That was your name for him, was it?"

"You do not appear so well satisfied with his letter as I am; but still you must, at least I hope you must, think the better of him for it. I hope it does him some service with you."

"Yes, certainly it does. He has had great faults, — faults of inconsideration and thoughtlessness; and I am very much of his opinion in thinking him likely to be happier than he deserves: but still as he is, beyond a doubt, really attached to Miss Fairfax, and will soon, it may be hoped, have the advantage of being constantly with her, I am very ready to believe his character will improve, and acquire from hers the steadiness and delicacy of principle that it wants. And now, let me talk to you of something else. I have another person's interest at present so much at heart that I cannot think any longer about Frank Churchill. Ever since I left you this morning, Emma, my mind has been hard at work on one subject."

The subject followed: it was in plain, unaffected,

gentlemanlike English, such as Mr. Knightley used even to the woman he was in love with, how to be able to ask her to marry him, without attacking the happiness of her father. Emma's answer was ready at the first word. "While her dear father lived, any change of condition must be impossible for her. She could never quit him." Part only of this answer, however, was admitted. The impossibility of her quitting her father, Mr. Knightley felt as strong as herself; but the inadmissibility of any other change he could not agree to. He had been thinking it over most deeply, most intently; he had at first hoped to induce Mr. Woodhouse to remove with her to Donwell; he had wanted to believe it feasible, but his knowledge of Mr. Woodhouse would not suffer him to deceive himself long; and now he confessed his persuasion that such a transplantation would be a risk of her father's comfort, perhaps even of his life, which must not be hazarded. Mr. Woodhouse taken from Hartfield! No, he felt that it ought not to be attempted. But the plan which had arisen on the sacrifice of this, he trusted his dearest Emma would not find in any respect objectionable: it was, that he should be received at Hartfield; that so long as her father's happiness — in other words, his life — required Hartfield to continue her home, it should be his likewise.

Of their all removing to Donwell, Emma had already had her own passing thoughts. Like him, she had tried the scheme and rejected it; but such an alternative as this had not occurred to her. She was sensible of all the affection it evinced.

She felt that, in quitting Donwell, he must be sacrificing a great deal of independence of hours and habits; that in living constantly with her father, and in no house of his own, there would be much, very much, to be borne with. She promised to think of it, and advised him to think of it more; but he was fully convinced that no reflection could alter his wishes or his opinion on the subject. He had given it, he could assure her, very long and calm consideration; he had been walking away from William Larkins the whole morning to have his thoughts to himself.

"Ah! there is one difficulty unprovided for," cried Emma. "I am sure William Larkins will not like it. You must get his consent before you ask mine."

She promised, however, to think of it, and pretty nearly promised moreover to think of it with the intention of finding it a very good scheme.

It is remarkable that Emma, in the many, very many points of view in which she was now beginning to consider Donwell Abbey, was never struck with any sense of injury to her nephew Henry, whose rights as heir expectant had formerly been so tenaciously regarded. Think she must of the possible difference to the poor little boy; and yet she only gave herself a saucy conscious smile about it, and found amusement in detecting the real cause of that violent dislike of Mr. Knightley's marrying Jane Fairfax, or anybody else, which at the time she had wholly imputed to the amiable solicitude of the sister and the aunt.

This proposal of his — this plan of marrying and

continuing at Hartfield — the more she contemplated it the more pleasing it became. His evils seemed to lessen, her own advantages to increase, their mutual good to outweigh every drawback. Such a companion for herself in the periods of anxiety and cheerlessness before her! Such a partner in all those duties and cares to which time must be giving increase of melancholy!

She would have been too happy but for poor Harriet; but every blessing of her own seemed to involve and advance the sufferings of her friend, who must now be even excluded from Hartfield. The delightful family-party which Emma was securing for herself, poor Harriet must, in mere charitable caution, be kept at a distance from. She would be a loser in every way. Emma could not deplore her future absence as any deduction from her own enjoyment. In such a party Harriet would be rather a dead weight than otherwise; but for the poor girl herself, it seemed a peculiarly cruel necessity that was to be placing her in such a state of unmerited punishment.

In time, of course, Mr. Knightley would be forgotten, that is, supplanted; but this could not be expected to happen very early. Mr. Knightley himself would be doing nothing to assist the cure; not like Mr. Elton. Mr. Knightley, always so kind, so feeling, so truly considerate for everybody, would never deserve to be less worshipped than now; and it really was too much to hope even of Harriet, that she could be in love with more than three men in one year.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was a very great relief to Emma to find Harriet as desirous as herself to avoid a meeting. Their intercourse was painful enough by letter. How much worse had they been obliged to meet!

Harriet expressed herself very much, as might be supposed, without reproaches, or apparent sense of ill usage; and yet Emma fancied there was a something of resentment, a something bordering on it in her style, which increased the desirableness of their being separate. It might be only her own consciousness; but it seemed as if an angel only could have been quite without resentment under such a stroke.

She had no difficulty in procuring Isabella's invitation; and she was fortunate in having a sufficient reason for asking it without resorting to invention. There was a tooth amiss. Harriet really wished, and had wished some time, to consult a dentist. Mrs. John Knightley was delighted to be of use: anything of ill-health was a recommendation to her; and though not so fond of a dentist as of a Mr. Wingfield, she was quite eager to have Harriet under her care. When it was thus settled on her sister's side, Emma proposed it to her friend, and found her very persuadable. Harriet was to go; she was invited for at least a

fortnight; she was to be conveyed in Mr. Woodhouse's carriage. It was all arranged, it was all completed, and Harriet was safe in Brunswick Square.

Now Emma could, indeed, enjoy Mr. Knightley's visits; now she could talk, and she could listen with true happiness, unchecked by that sense of injustice, of guilt, of something most painful, which had haunted her when remembering how disappointed a heart was near her, how much might at that moment and at a little distance be enduring by the feelings which she had led astray herself.

The difference of Harriet at Mrs. Goddard's or in London made perhaps an unreasonable difference in Emma's sensations; but she could not think of her in London without objects of curiosity and employment which must be averting the past and carrying her out of herself.

She would not allow any other anxiety to succeed directly to the place in her mind which Harriet had occupied. There was a communication before her, one which she only could be competent to make, — the confession of her engagement to her father; but she would have nothing to do with it at present. She had resolved to defer the disclosure till Mrs. Weston was safe and well. No additional agitation should be thrown at this period among those she loved; and the evil should not act on herself by anticipation before the appointed time. A fortnight, at least, of leisure and peace of mind, to crown every warmer but more agitating delight, should be hers.

She soon resolved, equally as a duty and a pleasure, to employ half an hour of this holiday of spirits in calling on Miss Fairfax. She ought to go, and she was longing to see her; the resemblance of their present situations increasing every other motive of good will. It would be a secret satisfaction; but the consciousness of a similarity of prospect would certainly add to the interest with which she should attend to anything Jane might communicate.

She went — she had driven once unsuccessfully to the door, but had not been into the house since the morning after Box Hill, when poor Jane had been in such distress as had filled her with compassion, though all the worst of her sufferings had been unsuspected. The fear of being still unwelcome determined her, though assured of their being at home, to wait in the passage, and send up her name. She heard Patty announcing it; but no such bustle succeeded as poor Miss Bates had before made so happily intelligible. No; she heard nothing but the instant reply of "Beg her to walk up;" and a moment afterwards she was met on the stairs by Jane herself, coming eagerly forward as if no other reception of her were felt sufficient. Emma had never seen her look so well, so lovely, so engaging. There was consciousness, animation, and warmth; there was everything which her countenance or manner could ever have wanted. She came forward with an offered hand, and said, in a low but very feeling tone, —

"This is most kind, indeed! Miss Woodhouse, it is impossible for me to express — I hope you

will believe — excuse me for being so entirely without words."

Emma was gratified, and would soon have shown no want of words if the sound of Mrs. Elton's voice from the sitting-room had not checked her, and made it expedient to compress all her friendly and all her congratulatory sensations into a very, very earnest shake of the hand.

Mrs. Bates and Mrs. Elton were together. Miss Bates was out, which accounted for the previous tranquillity. Emma could have wished Mrs. Elton elsewhere; but she was in a humor to have patience with everybody; and as Mrs. Elton met her with unusual graciousness, she hoped the *rencontre* would do them no harm.

She soon believed herself to penetrate Mrs. Elton's thoughts, and understand why she was, like herself, in happy spirits; it was being in Miss Fairfax's confidence, and fancying herself acquainted with what was still a secret to other people. Emma saw symptoms of it immediately in the expression of her face; and while paying her own compliments to Mrs. Bates, and appearing to attend to the good old lady's replies, she saw her with a sort of anxious parade of mystery fold up a letter which she had apparently been reading aloud to Miss Fairfax, and return it into the purple and gold reticule by her side, saying, with significant nods, —

"We can finish this some other time, you know. You and I shall not want opportunities; and, in fact, you have heard all the essential already. I only wanted to prove to you that Mrs. S. admits our

apology, and is not offended. You see how delightfully she writes. Oh, she is a sweet creature! You would have doated on her, had you gone. — But not a word more. Let us be discreet — quite on our good behavior. — Hush! — You remember those lines — I forget the poem at this moment: —

> 'For when a lady 's in the case,
> You know, all other things give place.'

Now I say, my dear, in our case, for 'lady,' read — Mum! a word to the wise. I am in a fine flow of spirits, ain't I? But I want to set your heart at ease as to Mrs. S. My representation, you see, has quite appeased her."

And again, on Emma's merely turning her head to look at Mrs. Bates's knitting, she added, in a half whisper, —

"I mentioned no names, you will observe. Oh, no! cautious as a minister of state. I managed it extremely well."

Emma could not doubt. It was a palpable display, repeated on every possible occasion. When they had all talked a little while in harmony of the weather and Mrs. Weston, she found herself abruptly addressed with, —

"Do not you think, Miss Woodhouse, our saucy little friend here is charmingly recovered? Do not you think her cure does Perry the highest credit?" Here was a side glance of great meaning at Jane. "Upon my word, Perry has restored her in a wonderful short time! Oh, if you had seen her, as I did, when she was at the worst!" And when Mrs. Bates was saying something to

Emma, whispered further, "We do not say a word of any assistance that Perry might have; not a word of a certain young physician from Windsor. Oh, no, Perry shall have all the credit."

"I have scarce had the pleasure of seeing you, Miss Woodhouse," she shortly afterwards began "since the party to Box Hill. Very pleasant party. But yet I think there was something wanting. Things did not seem — that is, there seemed a little cloud upon the spirits of some. So it appeared to me, at least, but I might be mistaken. However, I think it answered so far as to tempt one to go again. What say you both to our collecting the same party and exploring to Box Hill again, while the fine weather lasts? It must be the same party, you know, quite the same party, not one exception."

Soon after this Miss Bates came in, and Emma could not help being diverted by the perplexity of her first answer to herself, resulting, she supposed, from doubt of what might be said, and impatience to say everything.

"Thank you, dear Miss Woodhouse, you are all kindness. It is impossible to say — Yes, indeed, I quite understand — dearest Jane's prospects — that is, I do not mean — But she is charmingly recovered. How is Mr. Woodhouse? I am so glad. — Quite out of my power. — Such a happy little circle as you find us here. — Yes, indeed. — Charming young man! — that is — so very friendly; I mean good Mr. Perry! — such attention to Jane!" And from her great, her more than commonly thankful delight towards Mrs.

Elton for being there, Emma guessed that there had been a little show of resentment towards Jane from the Vicarage quarter, which was now graciously overcome. After a few whispers, indeed, which placed it beyond a guess, Mrs. Elton, speaking louder, said, —

"Yes, here I am, my good friend; and here I have been so long that anywhere else I should think it necessary to apologize: but the truth is that I am waiting for my lord and master. He promised to join me here, and pay his respects to you."

"What! are we to have the pleasure of a call from Mr. Elton? That will be a favor indeed! for I know gentlemen do not like morning visits, and Mr. Elton's time is so engaged."

"Upon my word it is, Miss Bates. He really is engaged from morning to night. There is no end of people's coming to him on some pretence or other. The magistrates and overseers and churchwardens are always wanting his opinion. They seem not able to do anything without him. 'Upon my word, Mr. E.,' I often say, 'rather you than I. I do not know what would become of my crayons and my instrument, if I had half so many applicants.' Bad enough as it is, for I absolutely neglect them both to an unpardonable degree. I believe I have not played a bar this fortnight. However, he is coming, I assure you: yes, indeed, on purpose to wait on you all." And putting up her hand to screen her words from Emma, — "A congratulatory visit, you know. Oh, yes, quite indispensable!"

Miss Bates looked about her so happily.

"He promised to come to me as soon as he could disengage himself from Knightley; but he and Knightley are shut up together in deep consultation. Mr. E. is Knightley's right hand."

Emma would not have smiled for the world, and only said, "Is Mr. Elton gone on foot to Donwell? He will have a hot walk."

"Oh, no, it is a meeting at the Crown, — a regular meeting. Weston and Cole will be there too; but one is apt to speak only of those who lead. I fancy Mr. E. and Knightley have everything their own way."

"Have not you mistaken the day?" said Emma. "I am almost certain that the meeting at the Crown is not till to-morrow. Mr. Knightley was at Hartfield yesterday, and spoke of it as for Saturday."

"Oh, no, the meeting is certainly to-day," was the abrupt answer, which denoted the impossibility of any blunder on Mrs. Elton's side. "I do believe," she continued, "this is the most troublesome parish that ever was. We never heard of such things at Maple Grove."

"Your parish there was small," said Jane.

"Upon my word, my dear, I do not know, for I never heard the subject talked of."

"But it is proved by the smallness of the school, which I have heard you speak of, as under the patronage of your sister and Mrs. Bragge; the only school, and not more than five and twenty children."

"Ah! you clever creature, that's very true. What a thinking brain you have! I say, Jane, what a perfect character you and I should make, if we could be shaken together. My liveliness and your solidity would produce perfection. Not that I presume to insinuate, however, that *some* people may not think *you* perfection already. But hush! — not a word, if you please."

It seemed an unnecessary caution; Jane was wanting to give her words, not to Mrs. Elton, but to Miss Woodhouse, as the latter plainly saw. The wish of distinguishing her, as far as civility permitted, was very evident, though it could not often proceed beyond a look.

Mr. Elton made his appearance. His lady greeted him with some of her sparkling vivacity.

"Very pretty, sir, upon my word, to send me on here to be an encumbrance to my friends so long before you vouchsafe to come. But you knew what a dutiful creature you had to deal with. You knew I should not stir till my lord and master appeared. Here have I been sitting this hour, giving these young ladies a sample of true conjugal obedience; for who can say, you know, how soon it may be wanted?"

Mr. Elton was so hot and tired that all this wit seemed thrown away. His civilities to the other ladies must be paid; but his subsequent object was to lament over himself, for the heat he was suffering, and the walk he had had for nothing.

"When I got to Donwell," said he, "Knightley could not be found. Very odd! very unac-

countable! after the note I sent him this morning, and the message he returned, that he should certainly be at home till one."

"Donwell!" cried his wife. "My dear Mr. E., you have not been to Donwell; you mean the Crown; you come from the meeting at the Crown."

"No, no, that 's to-morrow; and I particularly wanted to see Knightley to-day on that very account. Such a dreadful broiling morning! I went over the fields too," speaking in a tone of great ill usage, "which made it so much the worse. And then not to find him at home! I assure you I am not at all pleased. And no apology left, no message for me. The housekeeper declared she knew nothing of my being expected. Very extraordinary! And nobody knew at all which way he was gone. Perhaps to Hartfield, perhaps to the Abbey-Mill, perhaps into his woods. Miss Woodhouse, this is not like our friend Knightley. Can you explain it?"

Emma amused herself by protesting that it was very extraordinary indeed, and that she had not a syllable to say for him.

"I cannot imagine," cried Mrs. Elton, feeling the indignity as a wife ought to do, — "I cannot imagine how he could do such a thing by you, of all people in the world! The very last person whom one should expect to be forgotten! My dear Mr. E., he must have left a message for you, I am sure he must. Not even Knightley could be so very eccentric; and his servants forgot it. Depend upon it that was the case; and very likely

to happen with the Donwell servants, who are all, I have often observed, extremely awkward and remiss. I am sure I would not have such a creature as his Harry stand at our sideboard for any consideration. And as for Mrs. Hodges, Wright holds her very cheap indeed. She promised Wright a receipt, and never sent it."

"I met William Larkins," continued Mr. Elton, "as I got near the house, and he told me I should not find his master at home, but I did not believe him. William seemed rather out of humor. He did not know what was come to his master lately, he said, but he could hardly ever get the speech of him. I have nothing to do with William's wants, but it really is of very great importance that I should see Knightley to-day; and it becomes a matter, therefore, of very serious inconvenience that I should have had this hot walk to no purpose."

Emma felt that she could not do better than go home directly. In all probability she was at this very time waited for there; and Mr. Knightley might be preserved from sinking deeper in aggression towards Mr. Elton, if not towards William Larkins.

She was pleased, on taking leave, to find Miss Fairfax determined to attend her out of the room, to go with her even downstairs; it gave her an opportunity which she immediately made use of, to say, —

"It is as well, perhaps, that I have not had the possibility. Had you not been surrounded by other friends, I might have been tempted to introduce a subject, to ask questions, to speak

more openly than might have been strictly correct. I feel that I should certainly have been impertinent."

"Oh!" cried Jane, with a blush and a hesitation which Emma thought infinitely more becoming to her than all the elegance of her usual composure; "there would have been no danger. The danger would have been of my wearying you. You could not have gratified me more than by expressing an interest — Indeed, Miss Woodhouse," speaking more collectedly, "with the consciousness which I have of misconduct, very great misconduct, it is particularly consoling to me to know that those of my friends whose good opinion is most worth preserving are not disgusted to such a degree as to — I have not time for half that I could wish to say. I long to make apologies, excuses, to urge something for myself. I feel it so very due. But, unfortunately — in short, if your compassion does not stand my friend — "

"Oh! you are too scrupulous, indeed you are," cried Emma, warmly, and taking her hand. "You owe me no apologies; and everybody to whom you might be supposed to owe them is so perfectly satisfied, so delighted even — "

"You are very kind, but I know what my manners were to you. So cold and artificial! I had always a part to act. It was a life of deceit! I know that I must have disgusted you."

"Pray say no more. I feel that all the apologies should be on my side. Let us forgive each other at once. We must do whatever is to be done quickest, and I think our feelings will lose no

time there. I hope you have pleasant accounts from Windsor?"

"Very."

"And the next news, I suppose, will be that we are to lose you — just as I begin to know you."

"Oh! as to all that, of course nothing can be thought of yet. I am here till claimed by Colonel and Mrs. Campbell."

"Nothing can be actually settled yet, perhaps," replied Emma, smiling; "but, excuse me, it must be thought of."

The smile was returned as Jane answered, —

"You are very right; it has been thought of. And I will own to you (I am sure it will be safe) that so far as our living with Mr. Churchill at Enscombe, it is settled. There must be three months, at least, of deep mourning; but when they are over, I imagine there will be nothing more to wait for."

"Thank you, thank you. This is just what I wanted to be assured of. Oh! if you knew how much I love everything that is decided and open! Good-by, good-by."

CHAPTER XXV.

MRS. WESTON'S friends were all made happy by her safety; and if the satisfaction of her well-doing could be increased to Emma, it was by knowing her to be the mother of a little girl. She had been decided in wishing for a Miss Weston. She would not acknowledge that it was with any view of making a match for her, hereafter, with either of Isabella's sons; but she was convinced that a daughter would suit both father and mother best. It would be a great comfort to Mr. Weston as he grew older — and even Mr. Weston might be growing older ten years hence — to have his fireside enlivened by the sports and the nonsense, the freaks and the fancies of a child never banished from home; and Mrs. Weston — no one could doubt that a daughter would be most to her; and it would be quite a pity that any one who so well knew how to teach, should not have their powers in exercise again.

"She has had the advantage, you know, of practising on me," she continued, — "like La Baronne d'Almane on La Comtesse d'Ostalis, in Madame de Genlis' Adelaide and Theodore, and we shall now see her own little Adelaide educated on a more perfect plan."

"That is," replied Mr. Knightley, "she will indulge her even more than she did you, and believe that she does not indulge her at all. It will be the only difference."

"Poor child!" cried Emma; "at that rate, what will become of her?"

"Nothing very bad. The fate of thousands. She will be disagreeable in infancy, and correct herself as she grows older. I am losing all my bitterness against spoiled children, my dearest Emma. I, who am owing all my happiness to you, would not it be horrible ingratitude in me to be severe on them?"

Emma laughed, and replied: "But I had the assistance of all your endeavors to counteract the indulgence of other people. I doubt whether my own sense would have corrected me without it."

"Do you? I have no doubt. Nature gave you understanding; Miss Taylor gave you principles. You must have done well. My interference was quite as likely to do harm as good. It was very natural for you to say, what right has he to lecture me? and I am afraid very natural for you to feel that it was done in a disagreeable manner. I do not believe I did you any good. The good was all to myself, by making you an object of the tenderest affection to me. I could not think about you so much without doating on you, faults and all; and by dint of fancying so many errors, have been in love with you ever since you were thirteen at least."

"I am sure you were of use to me," cried Emma. "I was very often influenced rightly by you, —

oftener than I would own at the time. I am very sure you did me good. And if poor little Anna Weston is to be spoiled, it will be the greatest humanity in you to do as much for her as you have done for me, except falling in love with her when she is thirteen."

"How often, when you were a girl, have you said to me, with one of your saucy looks, 'Mr. Knightley, I am going to do so and so; papa says I may;' or, 'I have Miss Taylor's leave,' — something which you knew I did not approve. In such cases my interference was giving you two bad feelings instead of one."

"What an amiable creature I was! No wonder you should hold my speeches in such affectionate remembrance!"

"'Mr. Knightley.' You always called me 'Mr. Knightley,' — and from habit, it has not so very formal a sound; and yet it is formal. I want you to call me something else, but I do not know what."

"I remember once calling you 'George,' in one of my amiable fits, about ten years ago. I did it because I thought it would offend you; but as you made no objection, I never did it again."

"And cannot you call me 'George' now?"

"Impossible! I never can call you anything but 'Mr. Knightley.' I will not promise even to equal the elegant terseness of Mrs. Elton, by calling you Mr. K. But I will promise," she added presently, laughing and blushing, — "I will promise to call you once by your Christian name. I do not say when, but perhaps you may guess where,

— in the building in which N. takes M. for better, for worse."

Emma grieved that she could not be more openly just to one important service which his better sense would have rendered her, to the advice which would have saved her from the worst of all her womanly follies, — her wilful intimacy with Harriet Smith; but it was too tender a subject. She could not enter on it. Harriet was very seldom mentioned between them. This, on his side, might merely proceed from her not being thought of; but Emma was rather inclined to attribute it to delicacy, and a suspicion, from some appearances, that their friendship were declining. She was aware herself that, parting under any other circumstances, they certainly should have corresponded more, and that her intelligence would not have rested, as it now almost wholly did, on Isabella's letters. He might observe that it was so. The pain of being obliged to practise concealment towards him was very little inferior to the pain of having made Harriet unhappy.

Isabella sent quite as good an account of her visitor as could be expected: on her first arrival she had thought her out of spirits, which appeared perfectly natural, as there was a dentist to be consulted; but since that business had been over, she did not appear to find Harriet different from what she had known her before. Isabella, to be sure, was no very quick observer; yet if Harriet had not been equal to playing with the children, it would not have escaped her. Emma's comforts and hopes were most agreeably carried on, by Harriet's being

to stay longer; her fortnight was likely to be a month at least. Mr. and Mrs. John Knightley were to come down in August, and she was invited to remain till they could bring her back.

"John does not even mention your friend," said Mr. Knightley. "Here is his answer if you like to see it."

It was the answer to the communication of his intended marriage. Emma accepted it with a very eager hand, with an impatience all alive to know what he would say about it, and not at all checked by hearing that her friend was unmentioned.

"John enters like a brother into my happiness," continued Mr. Knightley, "but he is no complimenter; and though I well know him to have, likewise, a most brotherly affection for you, he is so far from making flourishes that any other young woman might think him rather cool in her praise. But I am not afraid of your seeing what he writes."

"He writes like a sensible man," replied Emma, when she had read the letter. "I honor his sincerity. It is very plain that he considers the good fortune of the engagement as all on my side, but that he is not without hope of my growing in time as worthy of your affection as you think me already. Had he said anything to bear a different construction, I should not have believed him."

"My Emma, he means no such thing. He only means —"

"He and I should differ very little in our estimation of the two," interrupted she, with a sort of serious smile, — "much less, perhaps, than he

is aware of, if we could enter without ceremony or reserve on the subject."

"Emma, my dear Emma — "

"Oh!" she cried with more thorough gayety, "if you fancy your brother does not do me justice, only wait till my dear father is in the secret, and hear his opinion. Depend upon it, he will be much farther from doing *you* justice. He will think all the happiness, all the advantage, on your side of the question; all the merit on mine. I wish I may not sink into 'poor Emma' with him at once. His tender compassion towards oppressed worth can go no farther."

"Ah!" he cried, "I wish your father might be half as easily convinced as John will be, of our having every right that equal worth can give, to be happy together. I am amused by one part of John's letter — did you notice it? — where he says that my information did not take him wholly by surprise; that he was rather in expectation of hearing something of the kind."

"If I understand your brother, he only means so far as your having some thoughts of marrying. He had no idea of me. He seems perfectly unprepared for that."

"Yes, yes — but I am amused that he should have seen so far into my feelings. What has he been judging by? I am not conscious of any difference in my spirits or conversation that could prepare him at this time for my marrying any more than at another. But it was so, I suppose. I dare say there was a difference when I was staying with them the other day. I believe I did not play

with the children quite so much as usual. I remember one evening the poor boys saying, 'Uncle seems always tired now.'"

The time was coming when the news must spread farther, and other persons' reception of it be tried. As soon as Mrs. Weston was sufficiently recovered to admit Mr. Woodhouse's visits, Emma, having it in view that her gentle reasonings should be employed in the cause, resolved first to announce it at home, and then at Randalls. But how to break it to her father at last! She had bound herself to do it in such an hour of Mr. Knightley's absence, or when it came to the point her heart would have failed her, and she must have put it off; but Mr. Knightley was to come at such a time, and follow up the beginning she was to make. She was forced to speak, and to speak cheerfully too. She must not make it a more decided subject of misery to him by a melancholy tone herself. She must not appear to think it a misfortune. With all the spirits she could command, she prepared him first for something strange, and then, in few words, said that if his consent and approbation could be obtained — which she trusted would be attended with no difficulty, since it was a plan to promote the happiness of all — she and Mr. Knightley meant to marry; by which means Hartfield would receive the constant addition of that person's company, whom she knew he loved, next to his daughters and Mrs. Weston, best in the world.

Poor man! — it was at first a considerable shock to him, and he tried earnestly to dissuade her from it. She was reminded, more than once, of her

having always said she would never marry, and assured that it would be a great deal better for her to remain single; and told of poor Isabella and poor Miss Taylor. But it would not do. Emma hung about him affectionately, and smiled, and said it must be so; and that he must not class her with Isabella and Mrs. Weston, whose marriages taking them from Hartfield had, indeed, made a melancholy change; but she was not going from Hartfield; she should be always there; she was introducing no change in their numbers or their comforts but for the better; and she was very sure that he would be a great deal the happier for having Mr. Knightley always at hand, when he were once got used to the idea. Did not he love Mr. Knightley very much? He would not deny that he did, she was sure. Whom did he ever want to consult on business but Mr. Knightley? Who was so useful to him, who so ready to write his letters, who so glad to assist him? Who so cheerful, so attentive, so attached to him? Would not he like to have him always on the spot? Yes. That was all very true. Mr. Knightley could not be there too often; he should be glad to see him every day: but they did see him every day as it was. Why could not they go on as they had done?

Mr. Woodhouse could not be soon reconciled; but the worst was overcome, the idea was given; time and continual repetition must do the rest. To Emma's entreaties and assurances succeeded Mr. Knightley's, whose fond praise of her gave the subject even a kind of welcome; and he was soon

used to be talked to by each on every fair occasion. They had all the assistance which Isabella could give by letters of the strongest approbation; and Mrs. Weston was ready, on the first meeting, to consider the subject in the most serviceable light; first, as a settled, and secondly, as a good one, — well aware of the nearly equal importance of the two recommendations to Mr. Woodhouse's mind. It was agreed upon as what was to be; and everybody by whom he was used to be guided assuring him that it would be for his happiness, and having some feelings himself which almost admitted it, he began to think that some time or other, in another year or two, perhaps, it might not be so very bad if the marriage did take place.

Mrs. Weston was acting no part, feigning no feelings in all that she said to him in favor of the event. She had been extremely surprised, never more so than when Emma first opened the affair to her; but she saw in it only increase of happiness to all, and had no scruple in urging him to the utmost. She had such a regard for Mr. Knightley as to think he deserved even her dearest Emma; and it was in every respect so proper, suitable, and unexceptionable a connection, and in one respect, one point of the highest importance, so peculiarly eligible, so singularly fortunate, that now it seemed as if Emma could not safely have attached herself to any other creature, and that she had herself been the stupidest of beings in not having thought of it and wished it long ago. How very few of those men in a rank of life to address Emma would have renounced their own

home for Hartfield! And who but Mr. Knightley could know and bear with Mr. Woodhouse so as to make such an arrangement desirable! The difficulty of disposing of poor Mr. Woodhouse had been always felt in her husband's plans and her own for a marriage between Frank and Emma. How to settle the claims of Enscombe and Hartfield had been a continual impediment, — less acknowledged by Mr. Weston than by herself, — but even he had never been able to finish the subject better than by saying, "Those matters will take care of themselves; the young people will find a way." But here there was nothing to be shifted off in a wild speculation on the future. It was all right, all open, all equal. No sacrifice on any side worth the name. It was a union of the highest promise of felicity in itself, and without one real, rational difficulty to oppose or delay it.

Mrs. Weston, with her baby on her knee, indulging in such reflections as these was one of the happiest women in the world. If anything could increase her delight, it was perceiving that the baby would soon have outgrown its first set of caps.

The news was universally a surprise wherever it spread; and Mr. Weston had his five minutes' share of it; but five minutes were enough to familiarize the idea to his quickness of mind. He saw the advantages of the match, and rejoiced in them with all the constancy of his wife; but the wonder of it was very soon nothing; and by the end of an hour he was not far from believing that he had always foreseen it.

"It is to be a secret, I conclude," said he. "These matters are always a secret till it is found out that everybody knows them. Only let me be told when I may speak out. I wonder whether Jane has any suspicion."

He went to Highbury the next morning, and satisfied himself on that point. He told her the news. Was not she like a daughter, his eldest daughter? — he must tell her; and Miss Bates being present, it passed, of course, to Mrs. Cole, Mrs. Perry, and Mrs. Elton immediately afterwards. It was no more than the principals were prepared for; they had calculated from the time of its being known at Randalls how soon it would be over Highbury; and were thinking of themselves as the evening wonder in many a family circle with great sagacity.

In general, it was a very well approved match. Some might think him, and others might think her the most in luck. One set might recommend their all removing to Donwell, and leaving Hartfield for the John Knightleys; and another might predict disagreements among their servants; but yet, upon the whole, there was no serious objection raised, except in one habitation, — the Vicarage. There the surprise was not softened by any satisfaction. Mr. Elton cared little about it, compared with his wife; he only hoped "the young lady's pride would now be contented," and supposed "she had always meant to catch Knightley if she could;" and, on the point of living at Hartfield, could daringly exclaim, "Rather he than I!" But Mrs. Elton was very much discom-

posed indeed. "Poor Knightley! poor fellow! — sad business for him. She was extremely concerned; for though very eccentric, he had a thousand good qualities. How could he be so taken in? Did not think him at all in love, — not in the least. Poor Knightley! There would be an end of all pleasant intercourse with him. How happy he had been to come and dine with them whenever they asked him! But that would be all over now. Poor fellow! No more exploring parties to Donwell made for her. Oh, no; there would be a Mrs. Knightley to throw cold water on everything. Extremely disagreeable! But she was not at all sorry that she had abused the housekeeper the other day. Shocking plan living together! It would never do. She knew a family near Maple Grove who had tried it, and been obliged to separate before the end of the first quarter."

CHAPTER XXVI.

TIME passed on. A few more to-morrows, and the party from London would be arriving. It was an alarming change; and Emma was thinking of it one morning as what must bring a great deal to agitate and grieve her, when Mr. Knightley came in, and distressing thoughts were put by. After the first chat of pleasure he was silent; and then, in a graver tone, began with, —

"I have something to tell you, Emma, — some news."

"Good or bad?" said she, quickly, looking up in his face.

"I do not know which it ought to be called."

"Oh, good, I am sure. I see it in your countenance. You are trying not to smile."

"I am afraid," said he, composing his features, "I am very much afraid, my dear Emma, that you will not smile when you hear it."

"Indeed! — but why so? I can hardly imagine that anything which pleases or amuses you should not please and amuse me too."

"There is one subject," he replied, "I hope but one, on which we do not think alike. He paused a moment, again smiling, with his eyes fixed on her face. "Does nothing occur to you? Do not you recollect? Harriet Smith."

Her cheeks flushed at the name, and she felt afraid of something, though she knew not what.

"Have you heard from her yourself this morning?" cried he. "You have, I believe, and know the whole."

"No, I have not: I know nothing; pray tell me."

"You are prepared for the worst, I see; and very bad it is. Harriet Smith marries Robert Martin."

Emma gave a start, which did not seem like being prepared; and her eyes, in eager gaze, said, "No, this is impossible!" but her lips were closed.

"It is so, indeed!" continued Mr. Knightley; "I have it from Robert Martin himself. He left me not half an hour ago."

She was still looking at him with the most speaking amazement.

"You like it, my Emma, as little as I feared, — I wish our opinions were the same. But in time they will. Time, you may be very sure, will make one or the other of us think differently; and in the mean while we need not talk much on the subject."

"You mistake me, you quite mistake me," she replied, exerting herself. "It is not that such a circumstance would now make me unhappy, but I cannot believe it. It seems an impossibility! You cannot mean to say that Harriet Smith has accepted Robert Martin. You cannot mean that he has even proposed to her again — yet. You only mean that he intends it."

"I mean that he has done it," answered Mr. Knightley, with smiling but determined decision, "and been accepted."

"Good God!" she cried. "Well!" Then having recourse to her work-basket, in excuse for leaning down her face, and concealing all the exquisite feelings of delight and entertainment which she knew she must be expressing, she added, "Well, now tell me everything; make this intelligible to me. How, where, when? Let me know it all. I never was more surprised — but it does not make me unhappy, I assure you. How — how has it been possible?"

"It is a very simple story. He went to town on business three days ago, and I got him to take charge of some papers which I was wanting to send to John. He delivered these papers to John, at his chambers, and was asked by him to join their party the same evening to Astley's. They were going to take the two eldest boys to Astley's. The party was to be our brother and sister, Henry, John ——, and Miss Smith. My friend Robert could not resist. They called for him in their way; were all extremely amused; and my brother asked him to dine with them the next day, which he did, and in the course of that visit (as I understand) he found an opportunity of speaking to Harriet; and certainly did not speak in vain. She made him, by her acceptance, as happy even as he is deserving. He came down by yesterday's coach, and was with me this morning, immediately after breakfast, to report his proceedings, first on my affairs, and then on his own. This is all that

I can relate of the how, where, and when. Your friend Harriet will make a much longer history when you see her. She will give you all the minute particulars, which only woman's language can make interesting. In our communications we deal only in the great. However, I must say that Robert Martin's heart seemed for him, and to me, very overflowing; and that he did mention, without its being much to the purpose, that on quitting their box at Astley's, my brother took charge of Mrs. John Knightley and little John, and he followed with Miss Smith and Henry; and that at one time they were in such a crowd as to make Miss Smith rather uneasy."

He stopped. Emma dared not attempt any immediate reply. To speak she was sure would be to betray a most unreasonable degree of happiness. She must wait a moment, or he would think her mad. Her silence disturbed him; and after observing her a little while, he added, —

"Emma, my love, you said that this circumstance would not now make you unhappy; but I am afraid it gives you more pain than you expected. His situation is an evil; but you must consider it as what satisfies your friend: and I will answer for your thinking better and better of him as you know him more: his good sense and good principles would delight you. As far as the man is concerned, you could not wish your friend in better hands. His rank in society I would alter if I could; which is saying a great deal, I assure you, Emma. You laugh at me about William Larkins; but I could quite as ill spare Robert Martin."

He wanted her to look up and smile; and having now brought herself not to smile too broadly, she did, cheerfully answering, —

"You need not be at any pains to reconcile me to the match. I think Harriet is doing extremely well. Her connections may be worse than his: in respectability of character, there can be no doubt that they are. I have been silent from surprise merely, excessive surprise. You cannot imagine how suddenly it has come on me, how peculiarly unprepared I was; for I had reason to believe her very lately more determined against him, much more than she was before."

"You ought to know your friend best," replied Mr. Knightley; "but I should say she was a good-tempered, soft-hearted girl, not likely to be very, very determined against any young man who told her he loved her."

Emma could not help laughing as she answered: "Upon my word, I believe you know her quite as well as I do. But, Mr. Knightley, are you perfectly sure that she has absolutely and downright accepted him? I could suppose she might in time, but can she already? Did not you misunderstand him? You were both talking of other things, — of business, shows of cattle, or new drills; and might not you, in the confusion of so many subjects, mistake him? It was not Harriet's hand that he was certain of, — it was the dimensions of some famous ox."

The contrast between the countenance and air of Mr. Knightley and Robert Martin was at this moment so strong to Emma's feelings, and

so strong was the recollection of all that had so recently passed on Harriet's side, so fresh the sound of those words spoken with such emphasis, "No, I hope I know better than to think of Robert Martin," that she was really expecting the intelligence to prove, in some measure, premature. It could not be otherwise.

"Do you dare say this?" cried Mr. Knightley. "Do you dare to suppose me so great a blockhead as not to know what a man is talking of? What do you deserve?"

"Oh! I always deserve the best treatment, because I never put up with any other; and therefore you must give me a plain, direct answer. Are you quite sure that you understand the terms on which Mr. Martin and Harriet now are?"

"I am quite sure," he replied, speaking very distinctly, "that he told me she had accepted him; and that there was no obscurity, nothing doubtful, in the words he used; and I think I can give you a proof that it must be so. He asked my opinion as to what he was now to do. He knew of no one but Mrs. Goddard to whom he could apply for information of her relations or friends. Could I mention anything more fit to be done than to go to Mrs. Goddard? I assured him that I could not. Then he said he would endeavor to see her in the course of this day."

"I am perfectly satisfied," replied Emma, with the brightest smiles, "and most sincerely wish them happy."

"You are materially changed since we talked on this subject before."

"I hope so — for at that time I was a fool."

"And I am changed also; for I am now very willing to grant you all Harriet's good qualities. I have taken some pains for your sake, and for Robert Martin's sake (whom I have always had reason to believe as much in love with her as ever), to get acquainted with her. I have often talked to her a good deal. You must have seen that I did. Sometimes, indeed, I have thought you were half suspecting me of pleading poor Martin's cause, which was never the case; but, from all my observations, I am convinced of her being an artless, amiable girl, with very good notions, very seriously good principles, and placing her happiness in the affections and utility of domestic life. Much of this, I have no doubt, she may thank you for."

"Me!" cried Emma, shaking her head. "Ah, poor Harriet!" She checked herself, however, and submitted quietly to a little more praise than she deserved.

Their conversation was soon afterwards closed by the entrance of her father. She was not sorry. She wanted to be alone. Her mind was in a state of flutter and wonder, which made it impossible for her to be collected. She was in dancing, singing, exclaiming spirits; and till she had moved about and talked to herself, and laughed and reflected, she could be fit for nothing rational.

Her father's business was to announce James's

being gone out to put the horses to, preparatory to their now daily drive to Randalls; and she had, therefore, an immediate excuse for disappearing.

The joy, the gratitude, the exquisite delight of her sensations may be imagined. The sole grievance and alloy thus removed in the prospect of Harriet's welfare, she was really in danger of becoming too happy for security. What had she to wish for? Nothing, but to grow more worthy of him whose intentions and judgment had been ever so superior to her own. Nothing, but that the lessons of her past folly might teach her humility and circumspection in future.

Serious she was, very serious, in her thankfulness and in her resolutions; and yet there was no preventing a laugh, sometimes in the very midst of them. She must laugh at such a close, such an end of the doleful disappointment of five weeks back, such a heart, such a Harriet!

Now there would be pleasure in her returning; everything would be a pleasure: it would be a great pleasure to know Robert Martin.

High in the rank of her most serious and heartfelt felicities was the reflection that all necessity of concealment from Mr. Knightley would soon be over. The disguise, equivocation, mystery, so hateful to her to practise, might soon be over. She could now look forward to giving him that full and perfect confidence which her disposition was most ready to welcome as a duty.

In the gayest and happiest spirits she set forward with her father, not always listening

but always agreeing, to what he said; and, whether in speech or silence, conniving at the comfortable persuasion of his being obliged to go to Randalls every day, or poor Mrs. Weston would be disappointed.

They arrived. Mrs. Weston was alone in the drawing-room. But hardly had they been told of the baby, and Mr. Woodhouse received the thanks for coming, which he asked for, when a glimpse was caught through the blind of two figures passing near the window.

"It is Frank and Miss Fairfax," said Mrs. Weston. "I was just going to tell you of our agreeable surprise in seeing him arrive this morning. He stays till to-morrow, and Miss Fairfax has been persuaded to spend the day with us. They are coming in, I hope."

In half a minute they were in the room. Emma was extremely glad to see him; but there was a degree of confusion, a number of embarrassing recollections, on each side. They met readily and smiling, but with a consciousness which at first allowed little to be said; and having all sat down again, there was for some time such a blank in the circle that Emma began to doubt whether the wish now indulged, which she had long felt, of seeing Frank Churchill once more, and of seeing him with Jane, would yield its proportion of pleasure. When Mr. Weston joined the party, however, and when the baby was fetched, there was no longer a want of subject or animation, or of courage and opportunity for Frank Churchill to draw near her and say, —

"I have to thank you, Miss Woodhouse, for a very kind, forgiving message in one of Mrs. Weston's letters. I hope time has not made you less willing to pardon: I hope you do not retract what you then said."

"No, indeed," cried Emma, most happy to begin; "not in the least. I am particularly glad to see and shake hands with you, and to give you joy in person."

He thanked her with all his heart, and continued some time to speak with serious feeling of his gratitude and happiness.

"Is not she looking well?" said he, turning his eyes towards Jane, — "better than she ever used to do? You see how my father and Mrs. Weston doat upon her."

But his spirits were soon rising again; and with laughing eyes, after mentioning the expected return of the Campbells, he named the name of Dixon. Emma blushed, and forbade its being pronounced in her hearing.

"I can never think of it," she cried, "without extreme shame."

"The shame," he answered, "is all mine, or ought to be. But is it possible that you had no suspicion? I mean of late: early, I know, you had none."

"I never had the smallest, I assure you."

"That appears quite wonderful. I was once very near, — and I wish I had; it would have been better. But though I was always doing wrong things, they were very bad wrong things, and such as did me no service. It would have

been a much better transgression, had I broken the bond of secrecy and told you everything."

"It is now not worth a regret," said Emma.

"I have some hope," resumed he, "of my uncle's being persuaded to pay a visit at Randalls; he wants to be introduced to her. When the Campbells are returned, we shall meet them in London, and continue there, I trust, till we may carry her northward; but now I am at such a distance from her — is not it hard, Miss Woodhouse? Till this morning, we have not once met since the day of reconciliation. Do not you pity me?"

Emma spoke her pity so very kindly that with a sudden accession of gay thought, he cried, —

"Ah! by the by," — then sinking his voice, and looking demure for the moment, — "I hope Mr. Knightley is well?" He paused. She colored and laughed. "I know you saw my letter, and think you may remember my wish in your favor. Let me return your congratulations. I assure you that I have heard the news with the warmest interest and satisfaction. He is a man whom I cannot presume to praise."

Emma was delighted, and only wanted him to go on in the same style; but his mind was the next moment in his own concerns and with his own Jane, and his next words were, —

"Did you ever see such a skin, — such smoothness, such delicacy, and yet without being actually fair? One cannot call her fair. It is a most uncommon complexion, with her dark eyelashes and hair, — a most distinguishing complexion! So peculiarly the lady in it. Just color enough for beauty."

"I have always admired her complexion," replied Emma, archly; "but do not I remember the time when you found fault with her for being so pale, — when we first began to talk of her? Have you quite forgotten?"

"Oh, no! — what an impudent dog I was! — how could I dare — "

But he laughed so heartily at the recollection that Emma could not help saying, —

"I do suspect that in the midst of your perplexities at that time you had very great amusement in tricking us all. I am sure you had. I am sure it was a consolation to you."

"Oh, no, no, no! — how can you suspect me of such a thing? I was the most miserable wretch."

"Not quite so miserable as to be insensible to mirth. I am sure it was a source of high entertainment to you to feel that you were taking us all in. Perhaps I am the readier to suspect, because, to tell you the truth, I think it might have been some amusement to myself in the same situation. I think there is a little likeness between us."

He bowed.

"If not in our dispositions," she presently added, with a look of true sensibility, "there is a likeness in our destiny, — the destiny which bids fair to connect us with two characters so much superior to our own."

"True, true," he answered warmly. "No, not true on your side, — you can have no superior, — but most true on mine. She is a complete angel. Look at her. Is not she an angel in every ges-

ture? Observe the turn of her throat. Observe her eyes, as she is looking up at my father. You will be glad to hear," inclining his head, and whispering seriously, "that my uncle means to give her all my aunt's jewels. They are to be new set. I am resolved to have some in an ornament for the head. Will not it be beautiful in her dark hair?"

"Very beautiful, indeed," replied Emma; and she spoke so kindly that he gratefully burst out, —

"How delighted I am to see you again, and to see you in such excellent looks! I would not have missed this meeting for the world. I should certainly have called at Hartfield had you failed to come."

The others had been talking of the child, Mrs. Weston giving an account of a little alarm she had been under the evening before, from the infant's appearing not quite well. She believed she had been foolish, but it had alarmed her, and she had been within half a minute of sending for Mr. Perry. Perhaps she ought to be ashamed, but Mr. Weston had been almost as uneasy as herself. In ten minutes, however, the child had been perfectly well again. This was her history; and particularly interesting it was to Mr. Woodhouse, who commended her very much for thinking of sending for Perry, and only regretted that she had not done it. "She should always send for Perry, if the child appeared in the slightest degree disordered, were it only for a moment. She could not be too soon alarmed, nor send for Perry too

often. It was a pity, perhaps, that he had not come last night; for though the child seemed well now, very well considering, it would probably have been better if Perry had seen it."

Frank Churchill caught the name.

"Perry!" said he to Emma, and trying, as he spoke, to catch Miss Fairfax's eye. "My friend Mr. Perry! What are they saying about Mr. Perry? Has he been here this morning? And how does he travel now? Has he set up his carriage?"

Emma soon recollected, and understood him; and while she joined in the laugh, it was evident from Jane's countenance that she too was really hearing him, though trying to seem deaf.

"Such an extraordinary dream of mine!" he cried. "I can never think of it without laughing. She hears us, she hears us, Miss Woodhouse. I see it in her cheek, her smile, her vain attempt to frown. Look at her. Do not you see that at this instant the very passage of her own letter which sent me the report is passing under her eye; that the whole blunder is spread before her; that she can attend to nothing else, though pretending to listen to the others?"

Jane was forced to smile completely for a moment; and the smile partly remained as she turned towards him, and said in a conscious, low, yet steady voice, —

"How you can bear such recollections is astonishing to me! They will sometimes obtrude: but how can you court them?"

He had a great deal to say in return, and very

entertainingly; but Emma's feelings were chiefly with Jane in the argument: and on leaving Randalls, and falling naturally into a comparison of the two men, she felt that pleased as she had been to see Frank Churchill, and really regarding him as she did with friendship, she had never been more sensible of Mr. Knightley's high superiority of character. The happiness of this most happy day received its completion in the animated contemplation of his worth which this comparison produced.

CHAPTER XXVII.

If Emma had still, at intervals, an anxious feeling for Harriet, a momentary doubt of its being possible for her to be really cured of her attachment to Mr. Knightley, and really able to accept another man from unbiassed inclination, it was not long that she had to suffer from the recurrence of any such uncertainty. A very few days brought the party from London; and she had no sooner an opportunity of being one hour alone with Harriet, than she became perfectly satisfied, unaccountable as it was, that Robert Martin had thoroughly supplanted Mr. Knightley, and was now forming all her views of happiness.

Harriet was a little distressed, — did look a little foolish at first; but having once owned that she had been presumptuous and silly and self-deceived before, her pain and confusion seemed to die away with the words, and leave her without a care for the past, and with the fullest exultation in the present and future; for as to her friend's approbation, Emma had instantly removed every fear of that nature by meeting her with the most unqualified congratulations. Harriet was most happy to give every particular of the evening at Astley's, and the dinner the next day; she could dwell on it all with the utmost delight. But what did such

particulars explain? The fact was, as Emma could now acknowledge, that Harriet had always liked Robert Martin, and that his continuing to love her had been irresistible. Beyond this, it must ever be unintelligible to Emma.

The event, however, was most joyful; and every day was giving her fresh reason for thinking so. Harriet's parentage became known. She proved to be the daughter of a tradesman, rich enough to afford her the comfortable maintenance which had ever been hers, and decent enough to have always wished for concealment. Such was the blood of gentility which Emma had formerly been so ready to vouch for! It was likely to be as untainted, perhaps, as the blood of many a gentleman; but what a connection had she been preparing for Mr. Knightley or for the Churchills or even for Mr. Elton! The stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility or wealth, would have been a stain indeed.

No objection was raised on the father's side; the young man was treated liberally; it was all as it should be: and as Emma became acquainted with Robert Martin, who was now introduced at Hartfield, she fully acknowledged in him all the appearance of sense and worth which could bid fairest for her little friend. She had no doubt of Harriet's happiness with any good-tempered man; but with him, and in the home he offered, there would be the hope of more, of security, stability, and improvement. She would be placed in the midst of those who loved her, and who had better sense than herself; retired enough for safety,

and occupied enough for cheerfulness. She would never be led into temptation, nor left for it to find her out. She would be respectable and happy; and Emma admitted her to be the luckiest creature in the world, to have created so steady and persevering an affection in such a man; or, if not quite the luckiest, to yield only to herself.

Harriet, necessarily drawn away by her engagements with the Martins, was less and less at Hartfield, which was not to be regretted. The intimacy between her and Emma must sink; their friendship must change into a calmer sort of good will; and, fortunately, what ought to be, and must be, seemed already beginning, and in the most gradual, natural manner.

Before the end of September, Emma attended Harriet to church, and saw her hand bestowed on Robert Martin with so complete a satisfaction as no remembrances, even connected with Mr. Elton as he stood before them, could impair. Perhaps, indeed, at that time she scarcely saw Mr. Elton, but as the clergyman whose blessing at the altar might next fall on herself. Robert Martin and Harriet Smith, the latest couple engaged of the three, were the first to be married.

Jane Fairfax had already quitted Highbury, and was restored to the comforts of her beloved home with the Campbells. The Mr. Churchills were also in town; and they were only waiting for November.

The intermediate month was the one fixed on, as far as they dared, by Emma and Mr. Knightley. They had determined that their marriage

ought to be concluded while John and Isabella were still at Hartfield, to allow them the fortnight's absence in a tour to the seaside, which was the plan. John and Isabella and every other friend were agreed in approving it. But Mr. Woodhouse — how was Mr. Woodhouse to be induced to consent? — he who had never yet alluded to their marriage but as a distant event.

When first sounded on the subject, he was so miserable that they were almost hopeless. A second allusion, indeed, gave less pain. He began to think it was to be, and that he could not prevent it, — a very promising step of the mind on its way to resignation. Still, however, he was not happy. Nay, he appeared so much otherwise, that his daughter's courage failed. She could not bear to see him suffering, to know him fancying himself neglected; and though her understanding almost acquiesced in the assurance of both the Mr. Knightleys that when once the event were over, his distress would be soon over too, she hesitated — she could not proceed.

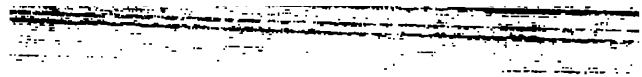
In this state of suspense they were befriended, not by any sudden illumination of Mr. Woodhouse's mind, or any wonderful change of his nervous system, but by the operation of the same system in another way. Mrs. Weston's poultry-house was robbed one night of all her turkeys, — evidently by the ingenuity of man. Other poultry-yards in the neighborhood also suffered. Pilfering was house-breaking to Mr. Woodhouse's fears. He was very uneasy; and but for the sense of his son-in-law's protection, would have been under

wretched alarm every night of his life. The strength, resolution, and presence of mind of the Mr. Knightleys commanded his fullest dependence. While either of them protected him and his, Hartfield was safe. But Mr. John Knightley must be in London again by the end of the first week in November.

The result of this distress was that with a much more voluntary, cheerful consent than his daughter had ever presumed to hope for at the moment, she was able to fix her wedding-day; and Mr. Elton was called on, within a month from the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Martin, to join the hands of Mr. Knightley and Miss Woodhouse.

The wedding was very much like other weddings where the parties have no taste for finery or parade; and Mrs. Elton, from the particulars detailed by her husband, thought it all extremely shabby, and very inferior to her own. "Very little white satin, very few lace veils; a most pitiful business! Selina would stare when she heard of it." But, in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union.

THE END.



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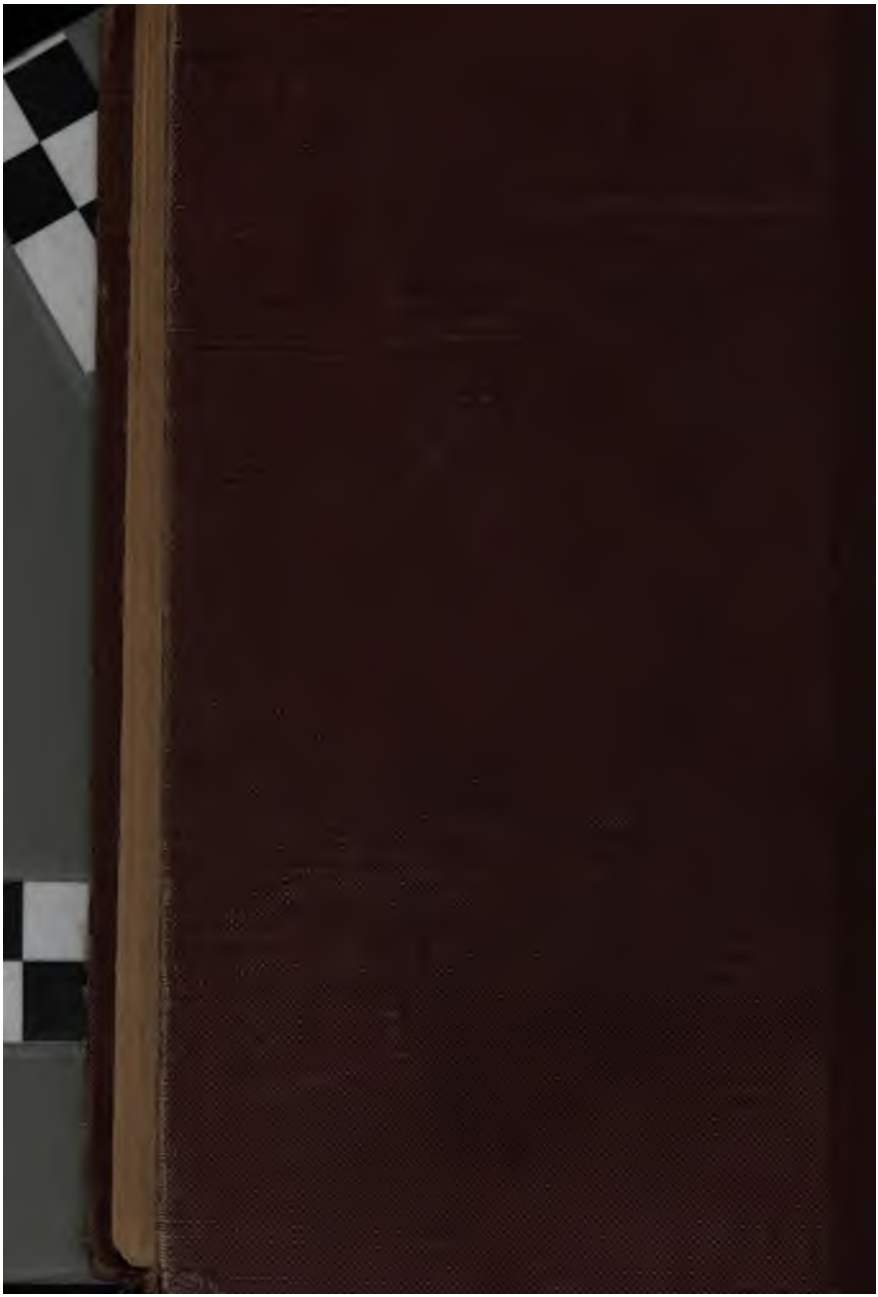
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